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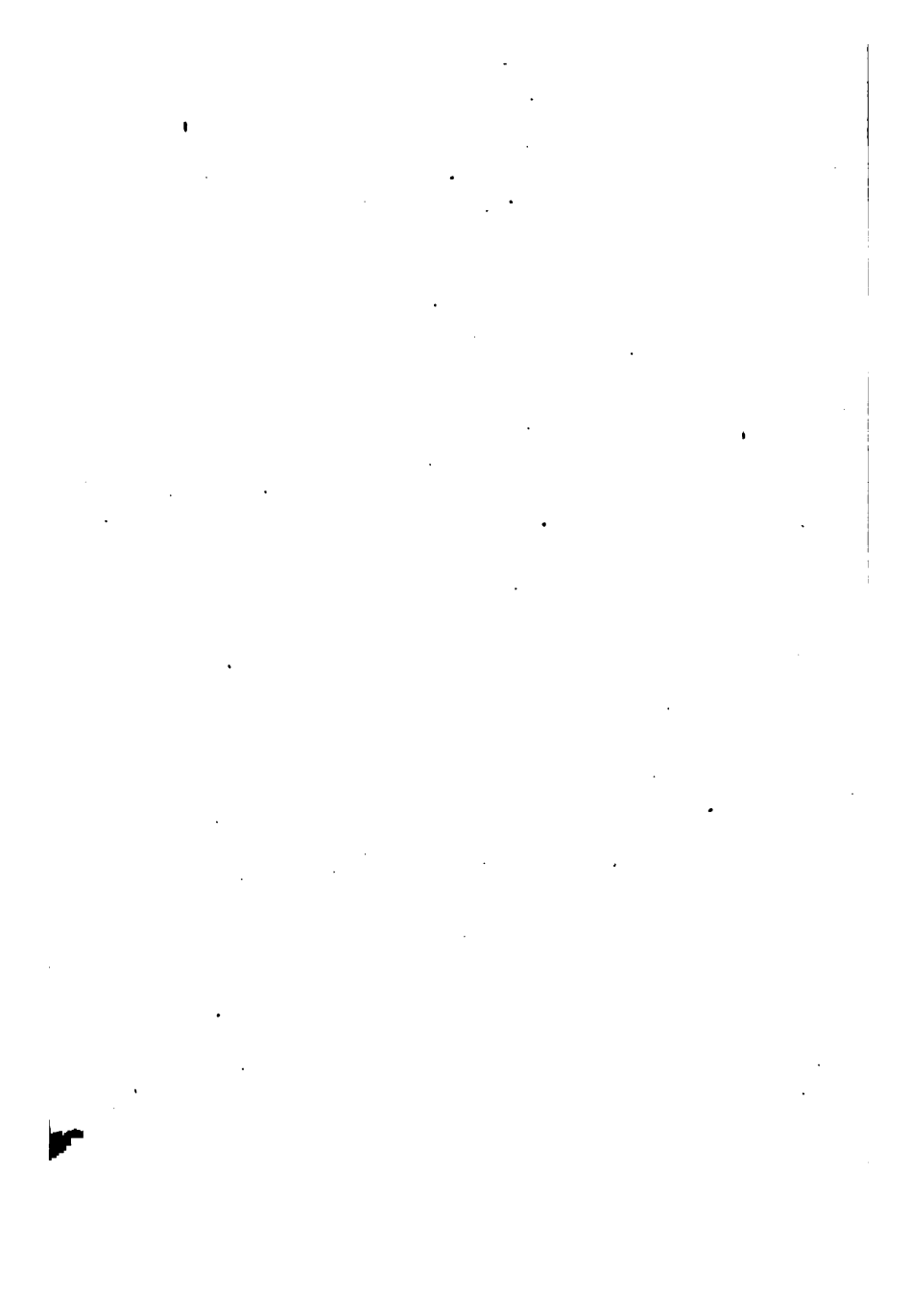




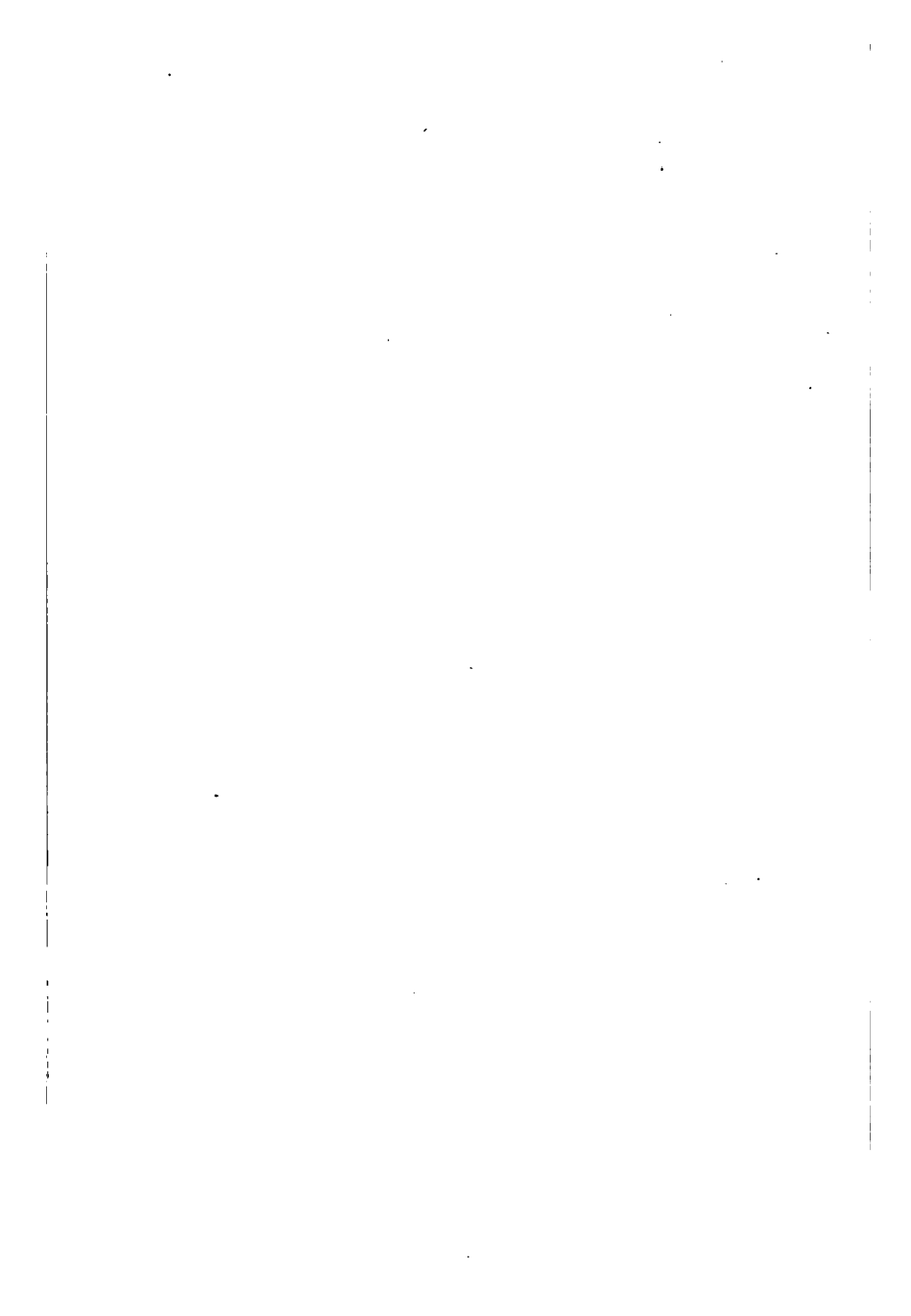
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JOHN HATHERTON.





LONDON  
JAMES NISBET & CO.  
21 BERNERS STREET.





# JOHN HATHERTON.

BY THE  
AUTHOR OF "EFFIE'S FRIENDS."

*Effie*

"The road stretch'd winding onward  
For many a weary mile,  
So dusty, foot-sore wanderers  
Would pause and rest a while;  
And panting horses halted,  
And travellers loved to tell  
The quiet of the wayside inn,  
The orchard and the well."  
ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

LONDON:  
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## PART I.

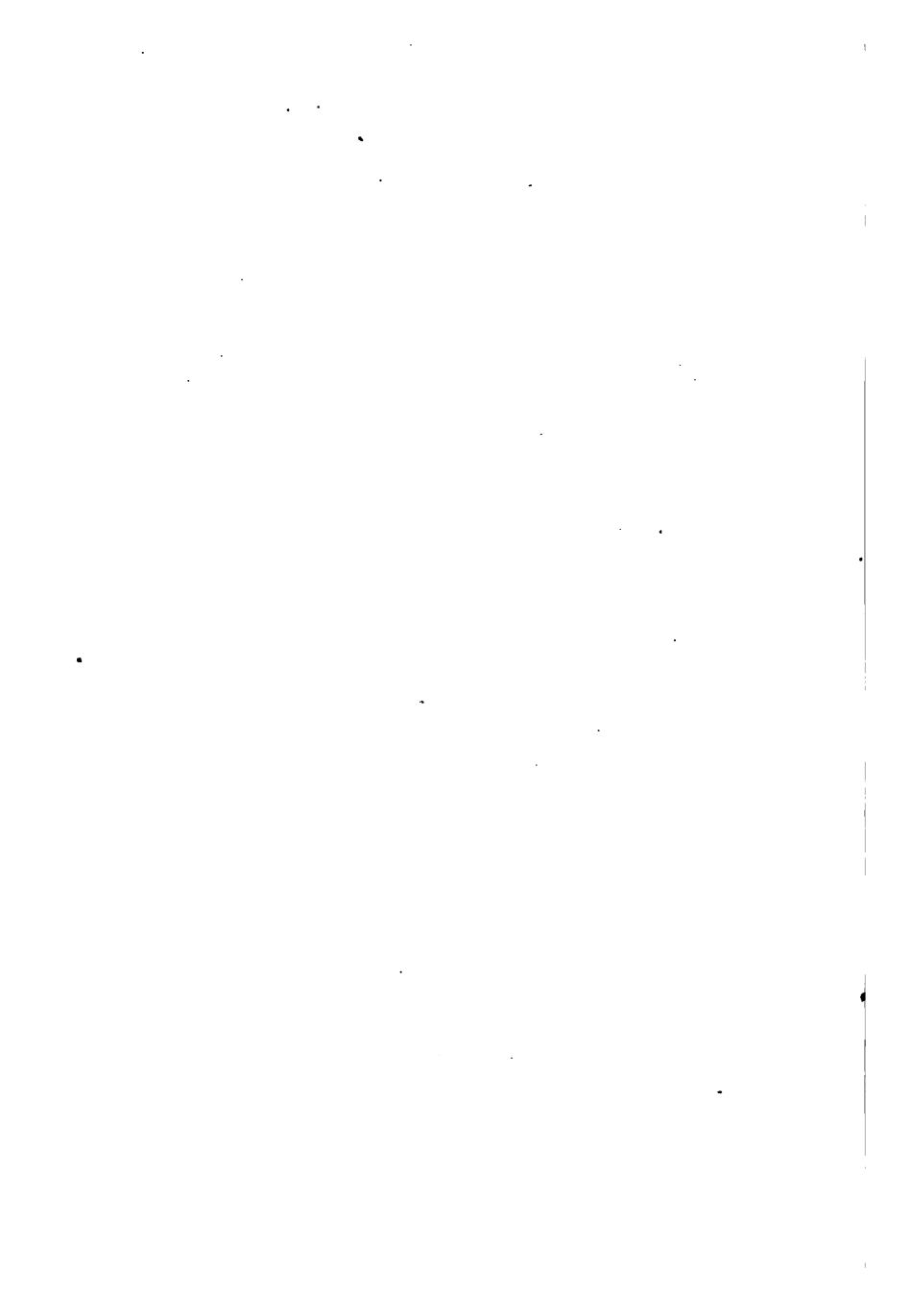


## MARJORY.

"He leads me to the tender grasse,  
Where I both feed and rest ;  
Then to the streams that gently passe :  
In both I have the best."

GEORGE HERBERT.







MARJORY FORRESTER always said that the common never looked so pretty as at sunset.

And all in the village of Farncombe agreed with her, and said they thought so too. When the London coach changed horses at the inn, and drove away through the lengthening shadows, along the smooth road, past the cricket ground, and amidst the purple heather, Farncombe always felt that it was being admired.

Geese cackled across the common, donkeys grazed there, and the furze bushes were yellow with blossom.

In one place the sandy hillocks dipped down to form a little pond, and there two people stood one summer's evening. A girl, close to the water's edge, was busily making "ducks and drakes" with some flat stones she held gathered in her apron-

"One, two, three, four," she counted, eagerly, as the stone flashed along the surface of the water, making a little train of glittering eddies. "Four! that was the best I ever made."

"Marjory!" said her companion, who stood behind her.

Marjory looked over her shoulder, and smiled at him as much with a pair of dark-blue eyes as with her rosy lips.

"Yes, John."

"Marjory, I brought you out here that we might have a little serious talk."

"Did you? I thought we came to be happy."

"Happy!" echoed John. "You know I am going back to London to-morrow."

"Yes, I know quite well, and I am very sorry."

"For good," pursued John, "I am going for good and"——

Another stone launched from Marjory's hand as she stood listening brought him to an abrupt conclusion.

"Marjory," he said, gently, and with a half sigh, "I wish you were not quite so young."

"O John! why? Because I like making ducks and drakes? Come along! I won't make any more, and we will have the serious talk."

They left the pond, and walked away across the

common, threading the narrow paths among the gorse bushes and heather. Perhaps it was not so wonderfully pretty, after all; but it was thoroughly countrified, and very fresh and quiet. Certainly John, when he went to London to-morrow, would leave a great deal to regret behind him, even without counting the lovely blooming little face that was by his side—at least he thought so.

“You are so very young,” he said again, as Marjory cleared, with a little gay jump, a low cluster of furze bushes, round which he had paced soberly, “so young that when I am gone you will soon forget me. Why, you haven’t even left off growing, have you? You are not seventeen yet.”

“I soon shall be,” said Marjory; “in August the 19th, John, don’t forget.”

“And in leaving you so young, such a child, I cannot bear to think what changes may come over you while I am away. You know that my only wish in life is to have you for my little wife some day.”

“Dear me,” said Marjory; “but, John, I didn’t know it at all.”

“Not know!” repeated John, reproachfully, “you will say next that you do not know how much I have loved you all your life.”

Marjory looked demure, and bent down to pick



some tiny blue "birds'-eyes" that grew beside the path.

"But, Marjory, my little Marjory, you do know it quite well. You know how hard I am going to work to make a home for you in London ; but while I am gone, what shall I do if you forget me?"

"I won't forget," she answered, her head still bent over the flowery turf.

"Will you not? Will you really not? But listen. You are only sixteen, and you are used to me. I am afraid I am not the least the sort of fellow that a woman can care about at all, and when you are a woman, my child Marjory, you may change!"

"No, John," said Marjory, softly.

"Some one else may come," he continued, almost as softly. "Somebody handsome and clever, more like a match for you than I am ; and you so young, so very beautiful, you may forget."

"Not if I promise!" And little Marjory lifted up her face, grown quite pale, and put her hand on John's arm.

"Can you promise?" he asked, eagerly. "Can you? Will you?"

"Yes, John, I suppose so, if you like."

"Promise, then."

"What am I to say? You frighten me!" said Marjory, half laughing.

"O child, don't laugh."

"I didn't mean to laugh, John, and I do promise. Don't be displeased."

"Displeased with you! Marjory, I am not worthy of you, I know, but"—

"Not worthy of me! You, the great London watchmaker, that is to be, living in a grand shop full of gold and silver watches; and some day," said Marjory, laughing, "a beautiful young lady will come in to buy a watch, and poor little Marjory will go straight out of your head, and"—

"Hush, Marjory! Oh, hush!"

"And there is father standing at our door looking for me, I know. Come in, John."

There never was a merrier home than Marjory Forrester's. It was the village inn, and stood facing the straggling street in front, but having a garden and orchard hidden away behind.

The house was very old-fashioned, and looked almost equally airy, cheery, and rickety. Its plastered walls were bound together by oak rafters. The upper story projected over the one below, and had the appearance of leaning over to communicate some comfortable secret to the

opposite house. The sun was so fond of gleaming against the lattice windows, that the inn seemed to be perpetually winking at the passers by. Before the door grew a big elm-tree, surrounded by a bench, where in summer all the gossip and smoking of the village was carried on.

When the doors were open, you could look through the house, and catch glimpses of bright flower-beds on the other side. One bough of an apple tree peeped within the frame made by the kitchen door; and white with blossom, or weighed down by rosy-cheeked apples, told of the sunny orchard lying beyond the garden.

"What a quiet old house, and what a peaceful garden!" a chance passer-by once observed to Mrs Forrester.

"Quiet! peaceful!" re-echoed the proud mother of many boys. She might well consider the compliment an ill-chosen one, for all the boys were at home. Dick had scaled the orchard wall and fallen into the pigsty on the other side. Ned had just broken the parlour window with a cricket-ball. Alice and Willie were perched on the weakest branch of the best apple-tree; and the family cow, browsing peacefully in the orchard, was startled at finding Charlie on her back. Far from keeping

order, Marjory was playing at ball with an apple, tossing it up to her carpenter brother Harry, who, standing on a ladder placed against the wood-shed, was supposed to be mending the roof. The noise was deafening. Every boy was shouting at the top of his voice. A Scotch terrier, who always expected the apple-ball to fall into his mouth, barked furiously, and, untaught by experience, made wild leaps at it by Marjory's side. Adding to this the fitful blasts of a penny-trumpet, and "Home, sweet home" whistled very much out of tune, perhaps it was no wonder that Mrs Forrester thought "peaceful" an ill-deserved epithet. She did not complain. She was accustomed to the noise, and thoroughly hardened to accidents.

"I shall call father," she sometimes went so far as to threaten, standing at the kitchen window to get cool after putting the pies in the oven.

But then every one knew that "father's" laugh would be louder and heartier than all the rest put together, and that he would be voted by acclamation ringleader of the rebels. So that threat usually fell very flat.

Into this merry household John Hatherton had made his way many years ago. It was a young household then, and he was but a boy himself.

An orphan boy, alone in the world, except for the old grandfather who had brought him up, and for a certain unknown cousin, a well-to-do watchmaker in London. John himself was destined to follow humbly the same trade, and was apprenticed to the only watchmaker in Farncombe. From the shop window, brilliant with silver watches as big as turnips, John could see the porch of the inn, and the elm with the bench round it. The Forresters were his great friends. All his evenings were spent with them, and much of his spare time wasted in watching for a sight of any one of them at the inn door. Sometimes it was Mr Forrester greeting a customer in his gig ; sometimes his wife came to chat with a neighbour or to watch the passers by ; sometimes John saw the fair head and laughing face of their little daughter. Marjory was then a toddling child, naughty and beautiful. She was only in her fourth year when she ascended the throne of the shy, awkward boy's heart, and she had reigned there ever since, its sole queen and mistress.

At five years old she fully knew her power, and used it. Many a time she sat at ease under the shady hedge in Farncombe green lane, while John gathered blackberries for her in the sun, tearing

his clothes, and shedding his blood contentedly in her service.

At nine she nearly broke his heart, by a sudden affection for her brother Harry's best friend, a boy many years younger than John, with whom she walked home hand-in-hand from school, and to whom she looked up with sincere hero-worship as the acknowledged greatest pickle in Farncombe.

John wished himself a school-boy again, and pondered sadly enough on the advantage his young rival had over him in being at school near her all day. It was poor consolation that Marjory gave him over her school-books in the evening, and allowed him to prepare her next day's lessons, while she played at cricket in the orchard with Harry and his friend Bob.

Before she was eleven years old, however, John was happier, for Bob had run away to sea. Marjory was as merry a little romp as ever ; but when she came in at dusk, she often sat by John in the parlour window, and let him teach her her lessons. How easy John tried to make them for the scholar, whose thoughts were generally on the common, or in the hay-field, or wandering away after her brother Harry ! He thought it hard that she must learn at all, and for her sake viewed

with dismay the long array of figures on her slate, and the list of strangely-sounding European capitals in the geography book. John would fain have been able to do for her the long seam of plain work which she so hated, and during the execution of which the small forefinger of her left hand became as rough as a file, and covered with minute wounds, each of which went through John's heart. But he often sighed when it was completed, for then books and work were tumbled away together, and the little figure would flit out into the twilight, and by and by her laugh came in at the open window answering her father's. John knew that his chance was over for the evening, when Mr Forrester and his pipe and Marjory had the summer-house and the darkening garden to themselves until supper-time.

Two or three years more, and John was off to London. The offer of the rich watchmaker relation to take him into his shop was too good to be refused. At first, John would much rather have given it up, and remained faithful to the silver watches and the inn orchard at Farncombe ; but Mr Forrester considered this to be a direct flying in the face of Providence, and prophesied that he would make his fortune. So John submitted, and

with golden dreams of making a fortune for Marjory floating before his imagination, he started for London, leaving Farncombe and the light of his eyes behind him.

The short holidays which he had managed to spend there since were the eras by which John divided his life. Each one laid up for him a store of memories that fell like rays of sunshine across the monotonous tract of his London work. There was that merry Christmas, ever to be remembered, when he found Marjory and the boys all hard at work building a snow-man. What a game of snap-dragon they had that evening, and how late they sat round the roaring fire, while Marjory sang Christmas carols, and John had to describe everything in London !

Marjory had grown much taller before he saw her again. More than a year had passed, and it was autumn. They gathered blackberries after their old fashion, and went nutting expeditions into Combe wood ; but Marjory let the boys gather nuts alone, and sat still under the trees talking to John. Yes, that was perhaps the best visit of all. There was a long time afterwards, during which he never saw her, and only heard the Farncombe news in letters. Even they had but little to tell ;



only Harry, the eldest son, had set up for himself as a carpenter, and lived in a pretty cottage within a stone's-throw of the inn. He wanted Marjory to live with him altogether as his housekeeper, promising her as a bribe, the gayest garden and the choicest roses to be found in the parish. "Those two never are apart, you know," wrote Mrs Forrester in a letter to John, ordering a new eight-day clock for Harry's cottage.

It was news to John that Marjory was old enough to keep house for anybody. But it did not at all suit his ideas that she should be Harry's housekeeper. So after lying awake three nights thinking, he asked leave to take the eight-day clock himself to Farncombe, and there determined to put his fate to the touch, to win or lose it all. When he came in from that sunset walk on the common, he knew that he had won it.

Mr Forrester gave his consent, after an interval of blank surprise at the idea of little Marjory's marriage. "If she must marry any one, I had rather it was you, my boy," he said, and then added apart, "And you see, mother, it needn't be for years to come. John can wait; and now I think of it, our little Bluebell is growing at we should never keep her long."

"Mother" shook her head and dried her eyes, but poor John was so steeped in silent bliss that she could not find it in her warm heart to say a word against him. Besides, John had been trusted with the care of Marjory on all sorts of occasions ever since she could walk. It would never do to leave off trusting him now. It was quite too late in the day for that.

The engagement was discussed among the rest of the family with true brother and sisterly freedom.

"I am very glad," began Alice, in the orchard. "But I should like it better if John were taller and had not got red hair."

"Nonsense about red hair," retorted Willie, whose own curly wig was decidedly tawny. "But he never played at cricket in his life."

"Or fired off a gun," added Dick.

"And I don't believe he can swim, can he?" put in Ned, as anxiously as if swimming were an essential qualification for married happiness.

"I am sure he knows nothing of horses," said Charlie. "He is safe to upset Madge if he tries to drive her in his gig."

"That doesn't so much matter," said Alice, "because I don't think they have gigs in London."

"Haven't they; poor Madge!" Charlie looked truly concerned.

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"I tell you he isn't welcome."

Marjory got her way in part, however. A very brief, cold letter was despatched to London, and received by John with disproportionate gratitude.

Notwithstanding Harry's opposition, the idea of waiting for several years was soon given up. John was getting on well in London, and kept writing imploring letters to Mr Forrester, which the worthy innkeeper grew very tired of answering.

"If they were once married we should have no more of this," he groaned one evening, as he sat with John's last appeal spread out on his desk, and a sheet of paper before him on which he could get no further than "Dear John,—Yours of the 15th inst. duly came to hand on Wednesday." "What am I to say now, mother; when it comes to putting it down in a letter, there seems nothing to say against letting them do as they please?"

"Marjory is very young," said Mrs Forrester, musingly.

"Haven't I told him so twenty times. Are these letters of his to go on for years?"

Clearly John had hit the right nail on the head. And then some friend of the family was good enough to think that long engagements were bad things.

and Mrs Forrester fancied Marjory looked pale ; so by and by John was allowed to look out for lodgings, and the winter was talked of for the marriage.

Mr Forrester had his reward. John's letters to him entirely ceased, and those to Marjory showed how completely a bewildered hunt after airy lodgings had absorbed his faculties.

"I don't know what you will say," he wrote, when he had chosen at last. "I have done my best. Of course they are not good enough for you, Marjory, my child ; but rents are high, and I never knew before that London was so dark. The landlady seems kind, and I have got some things."

Harry went to London about this time, and was taken by John to view his preparations. He walked through the small, dark rooms, and went to the window, which looked into a street gloomy and narrow enough to his country eyes.

He did not take much notice of the looking-glass in a gilt frame, of which John thought great things, or even of the pink china vase on the mantelpiece, waiting forlornly for flowers that never came.

John smoothed the checked table-cover, and waited for approval.

"Poor little Bluebell !" was Harry's comment.

It was a great blow to John.

"There will be white curtains put up before she comes," he said, deprecatingly, "and geraniums or rose-trees in the windows. And I drove a nail in yesterday, where I thought she might like to hang a cage with a bird."

"I don't fancy Marjory cares much to shut up birds in cages," answered Harry.

John closed the window, and pushed away the little flower-stand. "Then you think she won't like it?"

"Oh, I didn't mean that. But you see she is used to the country. I was thinking of Farncombe, where she is out among the birds and flowers all day."

"Ah, yes." John put the key of the china closet back into his pocket, leaving its glories undisplayed. He led the way down-stairs, and when they got into the street, repeated, "Out among the birds and flowers all day, poor little Marjory!"

It had come to this, then—Was he selfish in bringing home his treasure? Was he taking her from her bright home with nothing to give her in exchange but his deep love? Was that enough to make up to her for all else? Harry's words, "I am thinking of Farncombe," rang in his ears all the

evening. John, too, thought of Farncombe, as he had often seen it; in his memory it was wonderfully fair. The clusters of lilac-blossom waved and whispered in the spring wind, and the laburnums gleamed golden from among the leaves. The horse-chestnuts were bursting into bloom. In the inn orchard the apple-trees showered pink and white blossoms all over the grass.

And across the sunny turf came Marjory, like a queen of the May, laden with branches of lilac, straight bits of yellow broom, and fragrant boughs of thorn, with roses in her cheeks, John thought, that made her flowers look pale. He groaned and closed his eyes, that he might not contrast the reality with the scene he had conjured up, but still he fancied he could feel the pure keen air blowing in his face. That night he went to sleep with a weight upon his heart, but the next morning the sun was shining and things looked brighter. "After all," thought John, "those curtains will make a great difference, and it is only in spring that the country looks so wonderfully pretty." Ah, John! have you forgotten the golden summer days and the rich autumn tints?

Harry on his side went home to Farncombe, and stormed for half an hour at Marjory.

"Such dark rooms—such a dismal little street!"

Marjory only laughed.

"And such a dingy carpet," grumbled Harry, going off on a fresh score, "and the curtains all grimed with smoke, and no air!"

"We will wash the curtains and open the windows," said Marjory, still laughing.

"I don't like it at all, little Bluebell, for all that;" and Harry put his arm round her. "I don't think you know what you are undertaking; and then John has the most ridiculous ideas," and he told about the flower-stand, and the nail for the bird's cage.

"Dear John," said Marjory, softly.

"As if a few blighted geraniums and stunted rose-trees could do you any good; or some doleful bird working at its feathers all day long to get the blacks off. I told John you would not care for all his wretched plans."

"But I do care," said Marjory.

"Not you! Come, Bluebell, it isn't too late. Tell Hatherton you have thought better of it, and come and live with me. We will train roses all over the porch, and be the jolliest couple in Farncombe."

But Bluebell shook her head. "I think John wants me most," she said.




John and Marjory were married in November. John came down to Farncombe on a Saturday evening, and Monday was fixed for the wedding. He never forgot the long, strange, unreal Sunday that intervened. It was very sunny at Farncombe—autumn seemed to be lingering still, unwilling to give place to winter.

"What an inveterately sunshiny place this is," thought John. "I left fogs in London," he told Marjory, as they walked to church together.

"Never mind, John," she answered, laughing. John scarcely knew how the service in church went on that Sunday. "To-morrow" seemed written in the air wherever he looked, and he could not help picturing to himself how to-morrow he would walk down the aisle, with Marjory, his own wife, by his side.

They stood up to sing the hymn, and his thoughts were broken into by Marjory's sweet voice, a little tremulous, as for the last time it joined the familiar choir. Then everything grew real to John for a few minutes. He saw Harry standing near him looking rather cross, and almost as absent as himself, and Marjory and Alice with their heads bent over the same hymn-book. Farther on were the school children, intent on their



singing; and the face of one old woman, lined and withered, but lit up just now with a bright gleam of joy and praise. John looked at her, wondering. No future of untold happiness awaited her tomorrow, and yet he had a confused consciousness that her joy was more secure than his. "Your joy no man taketh from you." He repeated those words spoken but a few minutes before, and sighed.

The sermon was beginning. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." He heard the text, but no more. To bear Marjory's burdens, what an easy law!—to take every trouble of hers upon himself, and to spend his life in trying to lighten hers. John's thoughts wandered away into that coming life, and the preacher's words fell unheeded on his ear, until he felt Marjory's little hand touch his. Looking at her he saw that her eyes were full of tears, and her face of earnestness and resolution. She too had been thinking of her future life; and the little hand gave mute assurance that its help would not be wanting in bearing the burdens that time must surely bring.

Marjory took her last walk across the common when the November day was closing in. She often looked back upon that walk. It was put away

among the many pictures she kept treasured in her memory of the home she was leaving. The sky was blue with the sharp colouring of winter, and the west brilliant with patches of carnation and gold. Crimson cloudlets floated out into the middle of the sky, and every branch of the pine-trees was pencilled in dark tracery upon the blue.

Harry was with Marjory, and all the boys trooped after her. Alice followed, crying, scolded vigorously by Marjory's pet Charlie, because he felt half inclined to copy her example.

They left John at home with Mr Forrester, staring at the fire, and turning an unconsciously deaf ear to his future father-in-law's conversation. Marjory's father took his pipe from his mouth at last, and looked at him in silent curiosity. For the rest of the evening he puffed away without speaking, but he secretly regarded John's society as scarcely more desirable than his letters.

So next morning they were married, and came out into the churchyard, where faded yellow leaves floated down upon the bride's head.

There was a dense fog on the evening the young husband and wife reached London. It was raining hard, and the few rays of light from the street-

lamps, which struggled through the gloom, were reflected uncomfortably on the wet pavement.

"This is London," Marjory said below her breath, as the coach left fields and suburbs behind, and rattled along dark, dreary-looking streets. She took London on trust, for smoke and yellow fog between them had muffled up the mighty city, and blotted it out from view.

"You don't like it, how should you?" said John, despairingly, peering into his little wife's face, which looked pale and half-scared in the lamp-light.

"It is only strange, John," she answered cheerfully. "Look, we are stopping." She clung very closely to his arm, as the coach drew up with a jerk, and the guard opened the door and let in a rush of chill damp air and fog.

"We shall soon be home now, Marjory," John kept on repeating, as they came out into the crowded street, preceded by a man who had their boxes in a wheel-barrow, and was perpetually running up against somebody in the fog. "Soon be home now, my poor little darling;" and John began to pray mentally that there might be a good fire in their little parlour, and that the kettle might be singing on the hob ready for Marjory's tea when they arrived.

"How nice, how very nice, so much cosier than I expected! What a pretty looking-glass over the chimney—what a comfortable arm-chair!"

Marjory spoke in her cheeriest tones, flitting from one room to the other as she spoke, throwing down her bonnet and shawl upon the bed, and to John's eyes making it seem like a home at once, as she bent over the fire to see if the kettle boiled.

"Such a nice tea, too, and muffins! Did you order muffins, John? I suppose we can buy muffins whenever we like in London? And, John, wasn't the landlady kind; she said, 'Welcome home, Mrs Hatherton.' I don't think I was sure until then that I was Mrs Hatherton, and that this is home."

"Here now we are comfortable," as they sat down at the little round tea-table, which Marjory had drawn to the fireside. "Are you happy, John?"

"If you are, Marjory."

"You looked so grave a little while ago. What was it?"

"It was such a miserable welcome for you—the fog and the rain. London looked so wretched, and somehow," said John, piteously, "the sun seems always to shine at Farncombe."

"Not at seven o'clock in winter, you dear old John," laughed Marjory.

"If you can ever be happy here. If you can ever make this like a home, my bonny little country flower. But sometimes, just lately, I have been afraid that Harry was right, and that I am selfish."

Marjory put down the tea-pot and thought for a moment. Then going round, she leaned both her hands on John's shoulder, and said earnestly, "Wherever you are is my home now, John, dear. I shall make you sad if you are always watching me, and fancying I am not pleased, and I want to make you so happy. Will you not believe that I love you, and that you are my happiness and my home?"

John turned round, so as to see the sweet young face bent down towards him. There was no doubting the truth of her clear eyes. She was content.

"God bless you, my wife!" John said, solemnly.

And thus John and Marjory Hatherton entered on their new home.

John went off to his work early the next morning, and Marjory stood watching him rather disconsolately down the street. After he was out of sight she remained still at the window, looking out at the scene which was to become so familiar to her i-

the days to come. It was not a lively prospect,—it was not very amusing even to her country eyes,—for there was but little traffic ; and only now and then a cart rattled past the house, or a great coal-waggon went heavily rumbling down the street. Opposite was a butcher's shop—then a green-grocer's, where long strings of onions, bunches of dry radishes, and superannuated cabbages were liberally displayed. Next door to that was a dingy little private house, the windows of which were always shut, and a dirty card stuck behind the wire-blind, set forth in writing, almost illegible from dust, that “apartments to let” were to be found within. Marjory watched in vain to see it taken away. The apartments never were let, and the card became more hopelessly illegible.

“I am glad John did not take those lodgings,” Marjory used to think, for next door was a public-house, the swing-doors of which were perpetually moving, and wretched-looking people passing in and out.

“Poor people, poor people!” little Marjory often said, looking compassionately after them. Most of them vanished down a dark passage leading to a court, which Marjory was afraid to pass when she was alone. Such strange rough men came out of

the passage, and such forlorn ragged-looking women. Marjory often saw policemen go down there, or pace slowly past the entrance; and a kind of awe and mystery pervaded the place, in her imagination. Mrs Fuller used to shake her head and sigh when Marjory inquired about the court. It was a sore subject, for the neighbourhood wished, she said, to be respectable, and the court was continually thwarting its laudable endeavours. Marjory, however, could not help forming a silent and involuntary friendship with one of its inmates, a half-clad dirty little boy, who used to stand underneath her window, and smile at her when she opened it. He was very dirty; but the smile was such a bright one, gleaming over his poor little pinched face, shaded by masses of black hair. Marjory smiled back; and then the boy laughed, and stood upon his head. He must have thought the blooming young face looking down at him wonderfully pretty and pleasant, for he came again and again. Marjory was quite sorry to learn that he was a dangerous character, known as the deadliest foe of the old apple-woman at the corner, who sat all day long crouched under an umbrella, presiding over a pyramid of withered apples, some of which were often stolen, but rarely sold.



Mrs Fuller turned out to be a treasure of a landlady. She took Marjory to her heart at once. She was cheerful, motherly, and bustling, wore lively red ribbons in her cap, and had a big tender heart, marvellously easily touched by joy or sorrow. She cried when she saw John and Marjory walk to church together the first Sunday, because she said it was such a pretty sight. She cried when a street organ, with a desponding tremble in its tones, ground out a pathetic air beneath the window; and when her second-floor lodger got into difficulties, and disappeared without paying his rent, Mrs Fuller shed more tears over his share of the calamity than her own.

Many an hour she spent by Marjory's fireside, listening with breathless interest to her stories of Farncombe. Born and bred in London, they were better than any fairy tale to Mrs Fuller. She could have found her way alone across the common any day, and she watched for the postman bringing Farncombe letters with an eagerness that was only second to Marjory's.

Marjory often read her those wonderful letters by the fire-light before John came home, when the fog was settling heavily upon the streets outside, or the rain fell with a steady drip on to the pavement. They were very simple records of the village, but

full of interest to Marjory and her listener. "We went for a walk with Harry in the green lane after church," Alice wrote, and therewith Marjory paused and tried to make Mrs Fuller see the picture that the words brought before her own eyes. A brokendown gate, mossy with age, half open, leading into a grassy lane cut up by deep cart-ruts. The hedge on one side lay full in the broad sunshine ; on the other, it looked shady and dim. The ripening nuts hung down, and a pool of water lay close under the steep bank, dark and cool, except where a sun-gleam streamed through the overshadowing trees, like a blue vapour, making a spot of quivering light upon the water.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs Fuller, "very pretty, to be sure!"

"But how it is raining, Mrs Fuller, only listen! How wet John will be!" and Marjory bent down to peep for the twentieth time into the saucepan containing John's supper.

He would come in presently, dripping and radiant.

Those were John's halcyon days. He was getting on well in the world, and far away in the future there was a dim prospect of a partnership with his cousin that might make Marjory a rich

woman some day. Possibly years hence, John thought, with an innocent glow of triumph, Harry might have to acknowledge that Marjory had not been so very foolish after all in marrying him. He felt as though he were living in two worlds now. Sometimes during his busy working hours, he could scarcely believe in the reality of the little home which his young wife's presence transformed into a nook of fairyland. He saw it only in the cheerful morning, or in its evening glow of firelight and welcome, when its lighted window seemed to speak to him of greeting and comfort directly he turned the corner.

So spring—then summer stole upon them. For the first time in her life Marjory watched no buds unfold, and saw no flowers bloom. Now and then she drew a half sigh, quickly checked, as she thought that there were crocuses, and perhaps primroses at Farncombe. Later in the year John's little flowerstand was always filled with plants. Marjory tended them carefully, and tried her best to keep them fresh and green. Once to her dismay a tear fell upon their blackening leaves. Yet the time did not pass heavily; and when her mother sent her a big basket of apples from the

inn orchard, she realised, with surprise, that it was autumn.

And with the first snow-flakes there came a great treasure to the little lodgings they had grown to think of as home—never so much home as now—when a baby, and such a baby! slept in its cradle by the fire.

When John looked back in after life upon those years there seemed to have been no clouds over their sunshine. He could recall no troubles, except that very early in his career little Ralph smashed the pink flower-vase, and threw the bits at Mrs Fuller. Also the first-floor lodger, the steadiest and most desirable of men, gave warning, on the ground of not wishing to reside permanently under the same roof as a baby. But Mrs Fuller, who, through good report and evil report, faithfully adored the baby, indignantly pronounced him no great loss, and won Marjory's heart for ever.

As her boy grew older, John remembered that Marjory spoke more frequently of Farncombe. In the many quiet and unoccupied hours of his latter years, he often retraced each step of that portion of his life. Words and looks that passed unnoticed at the time returned freshly to his memory.

He remembered that he was jealous of the baby, and at the same time desperately ashamed of his jealousy. When he brought Marjory fresh flowers from Covent Garden, he was secretly disappointed at their being turned into playthings for Ralph, and twined into a wreath for his curly head. Once John remembered going to Kensington Gardens and taking Mrs Fuller.

It was on Whitmonday, a hot, cloudless day in early summer. The golden air scarcely stirred the leaves, or made ripples on the water. It might have been far away in the country, but for the dull roar from the distant streets, and the holiday-makers scattered everywhere along the walks. Marjory turned away from the frequented parts near the Serpentine, and went eagerly across the grass towards the shady glades of trees.

"Shall we sit down on a bench?" suggested John, as he plodded behind her, carrying the baby, who, wide awake, sat up in his arms, gazing with an air of composed criticism at the unaccustomed sight of grass and trees. Marjory made no answer, and he followed her patiently, very much overpowered with the baby, and very hot. Mrs Fuller was hot too, and no wonder. She had put on her best shawl, a vivid scarlet one, in honour of the

occasion, and made a flaming spot of colour on the sunlit grass. She had come out to see and to be seen, and did not see the good, as she told John, of going off to hide in the wood, as if they were ashamed of themselves.

"We see plenty of each other at home, Mr Hatherton," she observed, "and come out for a little change."

But Marjory did not notice either of them. She went on quickly with her head turned away from John, so quickly that, baby-laden as he was, he could not keep up with her. Mrs Fuller, even without the baby, was panting heavily.

What could ail Marjory? She had been very merry coming in the omnibus—was full of wonder at the crowds of people in Oxford Street, and thought Hyde Park looked very grand indeed.

"Marjory," said John, overtaking her with an effort, "where are we going? Don't you want to see the Serpentine, my dear, or Kensington Palace? Look, that big red house yonder." She had paused when she got far in among the trees, where there was no one to be seen, and no voices reached them but those of the birds singing overhead.

"We have hurried a long way, I must say, to

see very little," put in Mrs Fuller, nearly crying. "I can't see a soul from this thicket, and there was a band playing near the gate where we came in with a good big crowd round it."

"Will you go, John, and take Mrs Fuller to hear the music," asked Marjory.

"Tired, Marjory?"

"No, John; but let me stay under the trees while you are gone. Do go with Mrs Fuller."

So poor John started off again with the baby. He was away for some time, and came back alone. "Mrs Fuller is sitting on a bench listening to the band," he began, but he stopped and almost tossed the baby down upon the grass, for Marjory's face was hidden in her hands.

"Marjory! Marjory!"

"O John, leave me alone," she said, impatiently, pushing away his hand.

"What is it, Marjory? What ails you?"

"Nothing; oh, nothing!"

"Are you tired, dear? Oughtn't we to be going home?"

"Home," repeated Marjory, "already! Back into the streets away from the sunshine and the trees and the rooks. Oh, how I have wished to hear them caw again! Must we go back into all

the noise, and into that dark street? I almost thought I was at Farncombe."

And Marjory turned, and threw her arms round the tree beneath which she stood, resting her cheek against its rough bark, as though it were an old friend long missed.

John went away silently, and sat down on the grass out of her sight, and the baby rolled and crowed contentedly, unheeded by them both. It seemed a long time before John felt a light hesitating touch upon his shoulder.

He got up quietly, without looking at her.

"Would you like to go away?"

"Not yet.—John!"

"Yes, dear child."

"John!" she said again, almost in a whisper.

He took her hand and kissed it, and held it for a few minutes, as if there were something he wanted to say, but could not.

"It is not late," he said at last; "stay under the trees a little longer."

"Please not." Marjory stood before him with her hands clasped like a child, and her eyes full of tears. "Dear John, will you try to forgive me; don't be angry long, or sorry."

"I am only very sorry for you, Marjory."



"Oh, I wish we had not come to Kensington Gardens. Don't speak in that voice, John, or look like that. It was very wicked, but I am so sorry. I like London, indeed I do. Only for one minute, when I felt the cool grass under my feet, and saw the sun shining without any houses to shut it out, I thought of Farncombe and of my old self. I wanted to go away alone, and look and listen. Please believe me, it was only just for one minute. Then I remembered our little home, and baby, and how happy we are ; and oh, John, won't you forgive me ?"

"You don't understand, Marjory"—he began.

Perhaps the baby could not have done better than effect a diversion at that moment. A burning sense of neglect suddenly rushed upon him. For ten minutes his sacred person had been suffered to roll upon the grass unnoticed. Disgusted with the green branches and blue sky his mother loved so well, he suddenly expressed his disapproval in the most energetic manner. Marjory bent down hastily to raise him, but little Ralph's voice rose to a shout of dismay, as he felt a tear fall upon his face. For the space of some ten minutes he refused to be propitiated.

"John," Marjory said at last, turning back to her husband, "baby has forgiven me, won't you?"

They went back to Mrs Fuller, guided by the gleam of the scarlet shawl, which blazed like a beacon star from the distance. Marjory kept close to her husband, and every now and then stole an earnest glance up into his face. They listened to the band, and wondered at the great clumps of rhododendrons hanging in heavy masses of colour over the river. Marjory longed to make John understand how much she enjoyed the holiday he had planned for her ; but she was half afraid to admire anything lest he might fancy she was contrasting it with the streets. When the sun went down, and it was really time to go home to supper, she would not cast one look back at the gardens and the sunset sky.

That was almost the last time John ever remembered her regretting the country. She seldom spoke of it after their troubles began. They had been married for several years, and Ralph had had a little sister for a long time before they became so much poorer. John tried for a little while to keep a growing anxiety to himself ; but Marjory soon found out that he was hiding something from her.

It made the blow fall less heavily at last, that she knew all, and was ready to comfort him.

John's cousin, the watchmaker, failed. Most of his savings were lost, for they had been invested in the business, in prospect of the partnership to which he had looked forward. John was thrown out of work, in the dead season of the year, and it was many weeks before he could find a new employment. He grew years older during that time. They had only a few shillings left at last, and still he was going about the streets day by day in search of work, knowing that Marjory was at home without a fire, and sometimes with scarcely enough to eat. When spring came he found another situation ; but the wages were very small, and it was like beginning the world over again.

There came letters from Farncombe at this time that Marjory carefully kept from him. He knew, however, that they all thought he must have been very foolish, and that Harry was not a bit surprised. That Harry should have been right after all, inspired John with a feeling of utter discouragement. Only Marjory believed in his future still, and was full of courage and of patience.

"We shall always be quite poor, now," John said to her.

"But it is such a blessing to have regular work again, dear John." And with a willing heart she took up her share of the burden.

Mrs Fuller knocked at their door one evening towards the close of the following spring. Marjory was hard at work darning a little patched frock, and John sat watching her.

"Some one wanting to see you," said Mrs Fuller.

John got up, Marjory looked towards the door, threw down her work, and sprang across the room.

"Harry!"

"Marjory!"

"Are you come to see me at last? O Harry, I am so glad! Are we not glad, John?"

With one arm round Marjory, Harry held out the other hand to John—not cordially—scarcely even looking at him, but John did not notice that. His face was lighted up with a reflection of Marjory's flush of pleasure.

"Dear Harry, how well you look!" said Marjory, looking up with sisterly pride at his handsome sunburnt face and broad shoulders.

"Do I? Bluebell, is this really you?"

Marjory looked a little uneasy.

"I suppose I have grown old," she said, with an

attempt at her former gay manner. "Don't look at me so, Harry. When did you come to London?"

"Only to-day. I came straight to you." He took her little thin hand fondly in his. "Are you going to ask me to stay to supper?"

"O Harry! yes, of course. We were just going to have supper."

She laid it on the table. It was such a scanty supper. Marjory coloured, and the tears came into her eyes as she got it ready, not from any feeling of shame at their poverty, but because she felt Harry's eyes upon her face, after his one glance at the poor little supper-table.

"Come, Harry," she said, "I wish it were better for your sake."

"Are you not going to eat anything?" he asked.

She took something on to her plate directly, and tried to look as if she enjoyed it.

"I don't think John and I care much about supper."

"You don't look as if you did," said Harry, with an indignant glance at John, and a sorrowful one at her.

"Tell me about Farncombe," she broke in nervously. "I want to hear all about the old place."

"I can scarcely believe you are the same Mar-

jory that was taken away from Farncombe a few years ago."

"But I am. Do tell me about home."

"Home!" echoed Harry, leaning across the table towards her. "My poor little Marjory."

"Dear Harry, don't."

"Mother sends her love," resumed Harry. "She says she often wishes she could hear your merry voice again."

"And Alice?" Marjory's voice trembled a little.

"Alice is grown up of course. But she isn't like you. They all say she is not half so blooming as Bluebell, or so cheery."

John got up and walked towards the door.

"John," said Marjory, anxiously, "where are you going?"

"Down-stairs. I have something to do. I will come back in a little while."

He went away and left them alone together. When he got into a little room where he sometimes worked, he put out his candle, for he was not going to work now, and was mindful not to waste the light. A few moonbeams struggled in through the holes in the shutters, but he did not want to see even them. He put his head down upon his folded arms.

In the darkness a vivid picture was before his eyes. Harry's face—Marjory's smile. As he turned mentally from one to the other, the look stung and irritated him, the smile was full of tenderness and pity. And yet that memory brought the keener pang. Little Marjory, little Marjory, so bonny once, so cheery and so blooming, thin now, and pale, and with that smile that had in it so much more of love and patience than of gaiety. That other vision, too, that used to haunt him long ago, why did it rise up again to grieve him?—Marjory a girl among her flowers. He could not dwell long on that. His mind turned back to her as wife and mother, as he had seen her this evening with her children at her knee—as he left her when he came away, her eyes following him to the last.

The door opened softly. She came to him quickly through the darkness, and stood behind him, putting her arms round his neck and her cheek upon his head.

"Dear John—sitting in the dark!"

"I wanted no light, Marjory."

"I know, dear, I understand. Harry is gone, John. I almost wished him to go away, I wanted so to come to you."

"You have been hearing about home."

"About Farncombe," she answered, with an emphasis upon the name, and a caressing movement of her clasped hands, that told her meaning.

"It was all true that he said," groaned John. "I know it all. Does he think I ever forget what I have done to your life. But it seemed hard."

"It was cruel," said Marjory, "cruel. O John, don't; dear husband, hush," for John was sobbing, and his hot tears fell upon her hands.

"Darling," she said, incoherently, "I am well—happy—thankful to be your wife—proud to share your troubles. John, we are together, don't let any one come between us."

"I should like to have made your life such an easy one," said John, when he could speak. "It has pleased God that it should be very different. Your little hands carry the heaviest burdens, and smooth the roughest roads. My poor little girl, once I would not have believed that it could ever be so!"

"John," she said, softly, "I sometimes think that if you loved me not less, but perhaps differently, it would be better for you." She stopped a moment to think, and then went on, choosing her words very carefully, "I mean, if you were willing to let me take my share of any trouble—if it did not



grieve you so much every time the least care comes in my way—if you would let me try to help when there is a battle to be fought, perhaps it would be easier for you to fight it too. You are not angry, John?”

“Oh, no!”

“It is good of you to want to make me happy in the old careless way; but I like to feel that I am your wife, and that I help you while you work for me, and take care of me. Our lives, in these long happy years, have grown so much into each other's, that it would be no hardship to share your hardships, but it is hard to stand aside and see you trying to bear them all alone. I know I don't say it clearly, but you understand what I mean.”

“It is like you, Marjory, to say it; but it is not what I planned for you.”

Marjory sighed.

“Do you know,” she said presently, in a different tone, “that Harry went to look at Ralph asleep, and that he thinks him beautiful.”

Bold little Ralph certainly looked as if he had concentrated the health of the whole family in his own blooming little person. He had never given any one a moment's uneasiness, except by his evident determination to commit self-destruction.

He was never away from one of those points of danger—the window, the staircase, or the fire. He fell off the bannisters headlong, and was brought up to his mother by the groundfloor lodger, stunned and unconscious. He ironed his rosy little hand with Marjory's hot iron, and was too much surprised at the pain to cry. He was rescued from the tank in the backyard by the whole excited household, and came up out of the water choking, but undaunted. Marjory's gravest lectures were all wasted. Do what you would, you could not get bold little Ralph to be afraid.

"It's no good talking, my dear," said Mrs Fuller, as she and Marjory stood by the boy's bedside one day. He had fallen asleep with flushed cheeks and a bandaged arm, after various experiments with the carving-knife, which had resulted in alarming bloodshed. "Where is the use of telling bold little Ralph to be peaceable and quiet. He hasn't got it in him, no more than a ramping and a roaring lion."

"Poor little boy," said Marjory, "I daresay he will be very steady some day;" and she bent down proudly to kiss the peaceful little face, which looked so unlike a ramping lion's in its sleep.

Harry Forrester stayed for some days in London ;

and before he went away, asked to take Ralph back with him to Farncombe.

"He is the jolliest boy I ever saw. I wish he belonged to me."

Several years ago Harry had taken Marjory's advice, and married "the prettiest girl in Farncombe," but he had no children of his own.

"My mother wants to see Ralph. It will do him good."

Ralph's eyes had opened wide with longing as he heard of a carpenter's shop and a farmyard, besides unrestrained intercourse with an unlimited number of horses and dogs. He packed up his worldly all five days before his uncle was ready, and then broke down suddenly on the last evening.

"I had rather stay at home, mother. I forgot you wouldn't be there."

"But the horses, Ralph, and the cows," suggested Marjory, rather tremulously.

"I like you better than the cows," responded Ralph.

Marjory was sewing, and Ralph leaned against her knee, looking up with grave intentness into her face.

"You will be so happy, darling, when once you

are there," she said. "There will be the common for you to run upon, with such green, green grass, and donkeys and ponies feeding. And the cherries will be growing ripe on grandfather's sunny wall; and oh, Ralph, dear, everything is so beautiful!"

"Have you been there, mother?"

"It was mother's home once," said Marjory, quietly.

"Do you like London best?" pursued Ralph, opening his eyes.

"Better than Farncombe: O Ralph!"—Marjory threw down her work, and looked out at the dark street with almost a wild expression of longing on her face—"I loved Farncombe. I think of it day and night."

She paused and took up her sewing, and presently she resumed earnestly, "But I like to live in London best, Ralph, my boy, because it is father's home. He brought me here long ago."

"Was it unkind of father?" asked Ralph, in an awe-struck whisper.

"No, my darling, very, very kind. He is so good to me, Ralph, and loves me so much that I should be happy with him anywhere. But I am glad that

my boy should see the blue sky and the country, and be where mother was so very happy once."

Marjory's voice failed.

"John," she said, turning as he entered, "I have been telling Ralph about the common, and the merry old days when you and I were young."

"My poor child, I wish you were going too."

"I, John! without you. No, no; you and I are good Londoners. But Ralph's little feet have never trodden on real grass. I am ashamed of such a cockney son, are not you?"

She looked so merry that John smiled and kissed her, and thanked God in his heart that Marjory was happy. Ralph went, and was next heard of among the gooseberry bushes, and fishing fruitlessly but ecstatically with a crooked pin and a daisy.

They were glad at home that he should be away, for it was a very hot summer, and in July the weather became perfectly breathless and overpowering. The atmosphere of London was almost unendurable.

Marjory did not complain. It was only by her ceaseless rejoicings that her boy was in the country, that any one could guess how often her thoughts, too, were there.

"It is good for children, and for boys especially

to run wild a little, you know," she used to say. "Ralph is active, he might have felt the hot weather here. I fancy I see him running out into the garden when the fresh air springs up at sunset. The garden always had a good deal of shade, you remember, John."

"Yes," responded John, sighing.

"I used to like watching the village come to life again after a hot day," continued Marjory, with a smile in which there was no shadow of repining. "That cool wind used to go floating up the street and call every one out to enjoy it. The women used to come and stand at their cottage doors, and all the children poured out on to the common. I wonder if Charlie still takes the horses to be watered at the pond? How Ralph would enjoy a ride with him on the black cart-horse!"

Marjory knew that John was listening, though he did not speak, and she went on with one of those country pictures that were continually before her own eyes.

"The sun is full upon our house now, except for the great shadow of the elm-tree. Father is standing in the porch, I fancy; and Harry coming out of his work-shop and beginning to water his roses."

John was looking out of the window watching

the passers-by go wearily along the pavement. There was no evening breeze in this narrow street.

"Marjory, I wish you had gone with Ralph—you and little Ailie."

The colour flushed into Marjory's cheeks. "You didn't think I meant that, or that I should like it. Do you think I could go off, and not know the first minute if your wages are raised next month? I am afraid you are dreaming, dear old John."

"John thinks I am discontented if I talk of my old home," Marjory said when he was gone, and Mrs Fuller had come in to visit her. "He does not know how it rests me to think of the shadows and the silence, and the cool waters of the little pond on the common."

"Are you very tired, my dear?"

"Just a little, when it is very hot and Ailie is restless, but I get rested when I think of the dewy turf and the fresh smell of the flowers, and know that my little Ralph is there. But what rests me most now is to read this." She laid her hand on her Bible. "It is so calm and so full of compassionate words about green pastures and still waters. I never loved the Bible half so much when I lived in the country."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs Fuller, "I wish you

were there now. The weather is not healthy, and they say there are several cases of fever in the court over there."

"Don't tell John," said Marjory, quickly. "It would frighten him."

"Are you not frightened yourself? I thought maybe you could get away for a little into the country."

Marjory smiled.

"And leave John? No, dear Mrs Fuller, we could not afford a journey, and God will take care of little Ailie. Thank God, my boy is safe!"

A few days afterwards John came home to find Ailie lying in her mother's arms flushed and feverish.

"Ailie is not well," said Marjory, striving for the accustomed smile of welcome.

Mrs Fuller beckoned John away, and told him in a whisper that it was the fever, of which several people in the neighbourhood had already died.

John stood looking at her with an expression of terror and reproach which she never forgot.

"And you never told me."

"She would not let me."

John said no more, but went back to Marjory. She was leaning over her child, softly speaking



those words which she thought so full of rest. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters." Ailie was dropping off into a doze.

"Marjory."

She looked up.

"Couldn't somebody else nurse her?" whispered poor John, in his agony of fear. "Must you hold her? Couldn't we send her anywhere to be taken care of?"

"O John!"

The words were very gently spoken. They were full of love and sorrow. John did not ask again, but he wrung his hands, and turned away from Marjory. He could not bear to see her arms round the sick child.

By and by she carried Ailie away, and laid her down in her cot. Then she came back to John with her soft step and the light of perfect trust upon her face.

"Dear John," she whispered, "it is all right. Trust us to God."

"I cannot," he said, hoarsely, "I cannot trust you—anything else."

She did not tell him it was wrong. She only leaned her head upon his shoulder, and said

"Dear John," once or twice. When she went back to Ailie, John felt as if an angel's wings had touched him and calmed him.

Ailie became much worse that night. The doctor gave very small hopes of her getting well; and Marjory and Mrs Fuller both thought that she was dying.

John stayed but little at home during the next few days. He could not bear to see Marjory's tears; and poor little Ailie's perpetual half-unconscious call for her mother almost maddened him. He used to rush out of the house, and then came bitter self-reproaches. Was he really feeling angry with his dying child?

But through all he knew that Marjory understood him, and felt for him. "Go, dear John," she used to say, as he lingered near the little bed beside which she had knelt for hours, "Ailie will soon go to sleep now, and then I shall have a long rest." And through all its weariness her smile was as sweet as ever.

It was not God's will that Ailie should die. To Mrs Fuller's astonishment, to the doctor's surprised satisfaction, to her mother's overwhelming joy, the child began to mend. The fever left her, and there remained a little weak, wan shadow of

Ailie's former self—a little shadow that slept for long hours, and when awake was very cross and hard to please—that scolded her mother a great deal, and was always wanting something to eat.

"Ailie is so hungry, John," said Marjory, with a laugh that had in it the ring of former days. John went into the other room and bent down to kiss his little daughter.

"Things begin to look bright again," he thought, as he returned home the next evening, with a little basket in his hand, carefully lined with green leaves, and filled with big ripe strawberries. "Marjory always liked strawberries, and she must eat these herself, because they would not be good for Ailie."

Marjory rose rather slowly from an arm-chair as he came in.

"Well, Marjory," he said, cheerfully, "how is Ailie? Does the doctor think her better?"

"Yes."

"That is right. I am glad you are resting a little; you are quite easy about Ailie now?"

"Very, very thankful," said Marjory.

"Then we may be happy again, mayn't we?" he laid his hand upon the strawberry-basket.

"Yes, John, only"—Marjory hesitated, looking

at him with the piteous expression of a child who has something to confess.

"Only what? You look tired, do you know, Marjory—only what, my child?"

"I am afraid I have got the fever," almost whispered Marjory.

John did not feel as if it were a sudden shock to him. It was as if he had dreamt a dreadful dream, and had awakened to find it true—as if a blow, long-expected, had fallen upon him, and stunned him.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes, John."

"She ought to have been in bed hours ago," said Mrs Fuller, bustling in from the next room. "Only she thought it would be worse for you to come home and find her ill." He took her up in his arms, and carried her to her bed.

"Don't look so sorry, John," she said, when her head was laid upon the pillow. "I daresay I shall not be very ill."

John bent over her—"Marjory, my idol!"

"Hush," interposed his wife, smiling rather sadly. "You know idols are taken away?"

"You are my idol! How can I help it?"

"Dear John," she said, gravely. "I am afraid it

is wrong. If you love me too much God might think you would be better without me!"

"Is my great love to kill her?" thought John, in the long hours of a night during which he watched, and never slept. "Will she have to die because she is my idol? I cannot love her less. I would love her less if I could, if it were safer for her." And then he prayed, poor John, "Keep me from making an idol!"

Marjory did not grow worse rapidly as Ailie had done. She said she was tired, and lay without moving or speaking for hours together. John never stirred from her side. Others thought that the ceaseless watch of those mournful eyes must oppress her; but when she roused herself it was to say some little fond word to him.

He did not often speak to her. Sometimes he said, "Marjory, stay with me!"

"I am trying to stay," she always answered faintly, and it seemed as if she were struggling against the intense weariness that overpowered her.

"You wish to get better, my dear?" Mrs Fuller once asked her.

"John wants me," answered Marjory.

But one evening when John had been sitting by

her bed, half-afraid to breathe, because she was asleep, she awoke quietly, and turned to him.

"Dear John," she said, "I think I have been dreaming. I thought the angels came and lifted me up to carry me away to heaven, but when they had taken me a little way they stopped, for you were holding my hand still. They asked me if I was not ready to go, and I said yes, but that you wanted me. So they said they would wait a little longer; but when you left my hand they must come back for me!"

Marjory paused wistfully, but John tightened his grasp upon the little hand he held.

"It was only a dream, dearest. Did they say any more?"

"They said heaven was so beautiful," answered Marjory, wearily; "but I said I must not leave you, so they laid me down again, and I awoke."

A few days more, and John saw that no grasp of human love, however strong, could keep back one for whom the angels were waiting. He had taken little Marjory—such a light weight now—in his arms.

"John," she murmured, now and then, "poor John—poor dear!"

The words were repeated over and over again,

until he scarcely knew if she were conscious of their meaning.

A change was coming very slowly over her face—a sort of shadow, but John's eyes were heavy and blinded by tears, and he did not see it.

"My poor John!" Marjory had turned her head as it lay on his shoulder, so that her eyes could rest upon his face. "My poor John, I am sorry to leave you alone. It seems as if I were selfish, to go and rest so soon, and leave you to work. You know I would not have gone away if I could have helped it, but God thinks it is best for us."

Later she spoke a few more words.

"Ailie will live now, John, so you won't lose everything. You will take great care of her—great care—just as you always have of me."

Marjory paused—and in after days John often wondered if she were waiting for his promise. Surely she knew that it was only the more solemn that it was given without words. "When I am dead take Ailie in your arms, and think, O dear, faithful John, that she is Marjory's child!"

Her head fell back again wearily, and perhaps she felt the trembling of the arm that held her—she said, "Lay me down, dear John, and kiss me."

John laid her on her pillow and kissed her, remembering her dream, and understanding that he must let her go now. Scrupulously obedient to her last wish he no longer touched her hand. "My child might think I wanted to keep her back from the angels," he thought, as he knelt at the foot of the bed, striving to still his sobs. But Marjory heeded him no longer.

He watched on all through the night, and in the early morning the angels came again and carried her to heaven.

For some days John Hatherton wondered why the sun rose and set, and the world went on. Mrs Fuller would have comforted him if she had known how. In the evening she brought little Ailie to him. The child was asleep, but John remembered Marjory's words, and took her in his arms.

"Marjory's child!" he repeated, "Marjory's child!" and one or two of those slow tears which did not ease his pain fell on little Ailie's face and woke her.

The child began to cry, frightened at the haggard face and mournful eyes bent over her.

"She is used to her mother," and John gave her back. "She is Marjory's child!"



"You mustn't grieve so, Mr Hatherton; indeed you mustn't," said Mrs Fuller, when she had hushed Ailie on her shoulder. "Your wife is better off, poor dear. No doubt it is best for her."

Best for her! Was it really best for Marjory to leave him? John pondered on it long, when he was left alone. Best for Marjory! Had life been so hard for her? He remembered her own words: "I would not have gone away if I could have helped it, but God thinks it is best for us." Then if it was best for Marjory, he must be patient.

John went to look at her. The beautiful face was very white and still, but the lines that time and care had drawn were all gone out.

It was the Marjory of his early love. Marjory, as she looked in the church at Farncombe, singing the old hymns in her glad voice; Marjory, as she used to watch the sunset on the common,—not the mother who had wept over her sick child, the wife who met poverty bravely for her husband's sake. The restored youthfulness first showed him that she had been altered. So the dead face said to John more clearly than the living voice, "It is best for Marjory!"

They buried Marjory at Farncombe. Harry Forrester said she would have wished it, and John

was willing that she should lie beneath the daisies of the country turf. He went there for one day, and this time saw the sun set over Marjory's grave.

Harry came to him as he sat gazing over the common in the evening.

"John," he began abruptly, after a long silence, "I am going to Australia."

"Ah, indeed!" mechanically answered John, looking up with dimmed, wandering eyes.

"And I want to take Ralph with me."

"Our little Ralph," John turned to him and roused himself, "to Australia!"

"Ay; we have no children of our own, and I am fond of the boy. I daresay I can make his fortune out there. I hope you won't stand in his way."

"I don't know," said John, passing his hand over his forehead. "It's very sudden. I can't tell."

"I am sure poor Marjory would have wished it," persisted Harry.

"Would she? Are you sure?"

"Of course, we all know how she hated London," John winced; "especially for children. I haven't a doubt that she would have been glad."

Harry had found out that to assert Marjory's wishes was a sure and easy way of obtaining his own. He used the discovery unmercifully, for

John was no longer the same man that he had been. Some portion of himself had been buried in Marjory's grave. There was a sort of cloud upon his brain.

He sighed now, and looked irresolute. No power upon earth would have made him give up little Ailie, "Marjory's child," as her mother had herself called her on her deathbed. But for Ralph—bold little Ralph—it might be different. If Marjory would have wished her boy to seek his fortune in a new world, John only was left now to miss him. He knew she had planned an active life for Ralph, and that she used to say he would never do for a London tradesman.

"Come, John," and Harry put his hand on his brother-in-law's shoulder, "I mean well by you and our poor, dear Marjory. I will do my best for the boy, and my wife will be a mother to him."

"She can never be that," said John, sharply.

"Well, no, perhaps not. I beg your pardon, but you know what I mean. What can you do with two children on your hands in London?"

- Little Ralph, who was wandering about the garden, only half understanding why he felt so unhappy, here came up and laid his hand upon his father's knee.

John took up the small hand, and sighed.

"You will be able to do a great deal more for the little girl if you let me have Ralph," again urged Harry. "Besides, no one else can care so much for his dear mother's memory."

"As you will," John said at last. "You say Marjory would have wished it. I do not feel as if I knew myself what she would have said, but I must try to follow as clearly as I can what you think she would like. Take care of our boy, Harry."

John left his little son behind when he returned to London. The grief of parting with him was half forgotten in the deeper pain of leaving Marjory's grave.

He took Ralph there before he left him. He gave the boy no charge to remember him, but only said, "Ralph, my boy, never forget your mother."

Ralph looked down at the grave, and then up into his father's face. Presently, as John did not speak again, his eyes wandered away to the distant meadows, rising upwards from the banks of a peaceful little stream.

"'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,'" said Ralph, suddenly, struck with some unconscious association of ideas, "'He leadeth me beside the still waters.'"

John raised his head at the familiar words, and looked around.

"It has come true for her," he murmured.  
"Who taught you that, Ralph?"

"Mother," answered the boy. "I know it all.  
Shall I say it?"

"Yes."

And little Ralph clasped his hands behind him, and in a low, reverent voice repeated the psalm his mother had so loved, beside her new-made grave.

John went back to London alone. They had not expected him so soon, and his lodgings were dreary and unprepared. He went up into the darkened room that had been Marjory's. The furniture was all drawn into the middle of the floor, and the night wind blowing in from the open window extinguished his candle. How changed from Marjory's bright welcome!

John softly entered the room next door, where little Ailie lay asleep. As her father bent down to kiss her, his heart full of a silent promise to bear life for her sake, the child half awoke, and murmured, "Don't," as she pushed him away with her little hand. John went back into the sitting room, and sat down beside Marjory's arm-chair,

leaning his head upon it, and dimly wondering at his intolerable pain.

Mrs Fuller watched him anxiously at first, calling him a poor dear, but prophesying that he would settle down in time, and by and by she was able to assure her friends that he was settling down. That is to say, he was very quiet, gave no trouble, and worked if possible harder than ever. Any one who loved him would have been frightened at the change the last few weeks had made in him, but there was no one now to watch his face.

Only one wish had survived the wreck of his happiness—that of earning every comfort for Marjory's child. He was her patient and unfailing slave, submitting without question to all her whims, and they were many since her illness. However sad he might be, Ailie's peremptory summons to play with her was never disregarded. The child little knew how heavy-hearted was the cock-horse on which she rode to Banbury. Those nursery rhymes recalled almost more vividly than anything Marjory's sweet voice and laugh. But John remembered them all, and repeated them in tones that gave a grotesque pathos to the childish words, for, as he said to himself, "Marjory would have sung them to her child."

When they were alone together in the evening, before Ailie went to bed, John often talked to her of Marjory, and tried to draw the little girl on to speak about her mother. Ailie responded readily at first, but as the months passed on, John realised, with a sorrowful wonder, that Marjory's image was growing faint and dim in the child's memory.

So he spoke to her less often. But as the stars look brighter as the night darkens, so the shadows of time and distance only made the thoughts of the past to shine out upon him more clearly.

In course of time the name of Forrester was forgotten in Farncombe. Marjory's brothers grew up and went out into the world. Only sometimes, in quiet, thoughtful hours—on Christmas Eve, or in the summer twilight, they looked back at the inn orchard and the cricket ground on the common. The blue-bells they had once planted on their sister's grave bloomed and faded again and again. The old inn passed into other hands.

And the first chapter of John's life was closed for ever.

## PART II.



# MARJORY'S CHILD.

" Day after day we think what she is doing  
In those bright realms of air ;  
Year after year her tender steps pursuing,  
Behold her grown more fair.

" Thus do we walk with her, and keep unbroken  
The bond which nature gives,  
Thinking that our remembrance, though unspoken,  
May reach her where she lives."

LONGFELLOW.







**S**TRANGERS inhabited Marjory Hather-ton's old sitting-room. A little elderly foreigner sat every evening in the arm-chair that was once hers, by the fire-side, to which Marjory had come as a bride now thirty years ago.

Down-stairs, on the ground-floor, there was a shabby little room where vestiges of Marjory still remained. But it had none of that look of cheery comfort which her presence used to bestow. The scanty furniture was stiffly yet carelessly arranged. The fire smouldered sullenly, and no laughing jet of flame leapt up now and then, to make playful lights and shadows dance upon the wall. There was still a bird-cage hanging in the window, but the thrush inside had long thought that there was nothing in its life cheerful enough to sing about. So it drooped its head and was silent.

It was evening, and Mrs Fuller, over whose brow Time had passed with light footsteps, was busy with the supper. Not so the only occupant of John Hatherton's sitting-room, a pale, delicate-looking girl, leaning back in an arm-chair near the table, wrapped in a shawl, and pausing to rest after every other stitch she put in the work held languidly in her hands. She might have been a pretty girl if she had chosen ; such was Mrs Fuller's verdict, but she did not smile often enough, and looked discontented.

The door opened presently, and an old man came in. John Hatherton had grown very old during these thirty years. He stooped, and his scanty hair was almost entirely gray.

"Ailie, my child, how are you?"

"As usual, father," was the listless answer.

"I have been managing my work so as to give you another walk to-morrow. I thought you liked it yesterday, and weren't tired. I shall have time for you, Ailie."

"Thank you ; but I don't much care about it."

John had been stooping forward with a smile, in his eagerness at having found something which had seemed to please her. He drew back a little, and then bent down to arrange her footstool.

"Your head is aching, Ailie."

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

She leaned her head on her hand as if talking were an effort, and her father was silent. They were very often silent, those two, sitting over their fire. If they had been asked the reason, Ailie would probably have said that she was ill—John, that he was very tired.

His had been a tiring life, for there is nothing so wearing as a constant sense of failure. He had been struggling against this for many years. After his wife's death he had tried hard to get on a little in the world, for the sake of the daughter she had left him. But he seemed to be going down-hill instead, why or wherefore he never clearly understood. He was very poor now, and had to work hard. No one realised, certainly he did not himself, at the cost of how much self-denial he had striven to make Ailie's life a happy one. She was often listless and dissatisfied, and always ill, so that had been a failure too.

The twilight was filling the room just now, deepening slowly into darkness, with a calmness that was not soft and soothing, but dreary. Ailie asked for a candle at last. John lighted one, which he placed near her, and then drew his chair into a

corner, and sat there shading his eyes with his hand, as if even that feeble light dazzled them. No one but Ailie knew how quickly his eyes were hurt by light, how often he passed his hand uneasily across them. And Ailie thought little of it, beyond wondering now and then why he was so fond of sitting in the dark.

John stayed quietly in the corner and rubbed his eyes, and thought of the little room up-stairs, where he and Marjory used to live when he was young.

They were talking of him just then. In that very room Mrs Fuller was sitting with her new lodger, as in former days she used to sit with John Hatherton's young wife.

The new lodger's name was Mademoiselle Duval. She gave French lessons all day, and spent her evenings by a solitary fireside. It was many a long year since she left Switzerland and saw the last of its blue hills and lakes. But she had kept her brave Swiss heart and cheery spirit, and was not the least inclined to meet trouble half-way, or even to acknowledge that the burdens she had to carry were half as heavy as they looked. Yet Léonie Duval had had her fair share, rather a large share, of the troubles of life. For years past, how-

ever, she had settled down into a quiet little teacher of French, with no romance in her own life, but with plenty of lively sympathy for any touch of romance in the lives of others.

She had seen Ailie when she came to engage these lodgings, and had pitied the pale, sad-looking girl. Her predecessors interested her, especially when Mrs Fuller told her that only poverty would have made John Hatherton give up those little rooms which his wife's presence had made sacred. Sometimes when Mademoiselle Duval was out he ventured to creep up and give a wistful look at what had been his home.

Mrs Fuller could have talked about John by the hour. The poetry of his prosaic life went to her heart, and made her almost eloquent over the new lodger's tea and buttered toast.

"It has gone on for five-and-twenty years, so it has," she said, putting down her cup to dry her eyes on the corner of her apron. "He has slaved and driven, and no one ever thinks to give him a kind word or a smile."

"And all for the sake of that young spouse who is in heaven," said Mademoiselle Duval, lifting up her hands.

"He don't know what a day's rest means, tha

he don't, except on a Sunday, and maybe Christmas day. He just goes working on, and spends every farthing that he can scrape up on Ailie. He never thinks of himself, not he, from year's end to year's end, except to wonder, now and then, poor thing, if Marjory would be pleased with him and his goings on. Mrs Fuller, he has said to me, would *she* have wished things so? and Mr Hather-ton, have I replied, you behave like an Englishman and an angel, and can no more."

"He loves his girl much. She has filled up the life left so empty since his wife's death."

Mrs Fuller shook her head, and groaned.

"I don't know much about fillings up. But, Ailie," she said, impressively, "were left to him in a special manner, so to speak. When his wife lay dying in that room she bid him take care of Marjory's child. He has took care indeed, and worked for her, and spoilt her, and she is spoilt, to my fancy."

It was true enough. Amid poverty and sorrow Ailie had grown up a spoilt child. Fond as she was of her gentle father, she was regardless of his comforts, and he had trained her to appeal to him remorselessly for everything she wanted or fancied.

"The doctor says I ought to have some wine."

This or some such announcement often greeted John when he came in from business in the evening. Sometimes he started a little, and a puzzled look crossed his patient face. How was he to get it? Perhaps he had been congratulating himself on being just able to pay his debts. But he always managed a smile for Ailie, and nothing in his tone, as he promised to get her what she wanted, betrayed his uneasiness. After all it was only working a little longer, for he could often get extra work. It was not so very hard to be tired, and there was no bright fireside evening to be missed by staying out over-hours.

Lately, however, when Ailie had asked for some expensive luxury, her father only sighed and made no answer.

"I am sure a little change would do me good," she said, rousing herself suddenly after a long silence and sitting upright.

Her father took away the shading hand from before his eyes, and looked at her.

"It would be good for you too, father. How tired you must be to sit in that dark corner! Are you never going to have a holiday?"

"Me! oh no, not just now at least, for we are very busy. Never mind that, Ailie."



"I suppose it would cost a great deal for me to go to the sea?" said Ailie.

"I am afraid it would, dear."

"I am so sure it would do me good," repeated Ailie, restlessly. "I never have a change, and I should like it so much."

"I didn't know you wanted to go away," said her father, gently. "You never told me."

I never wished it half so much as I do now. Do you think you can manage it, father?"

"I will, if I can, dear child."

"Oh, never mind if it is so difficult," and there was an injured tone in her voice. "Only I thought you liked me to tell you when I want anything."

"Of course, dear, of course. Oh, Ailie, how glad I should be to send you if I could!" and John clasped and unclasped his hands nervously, and again pressed them over his eyes.

He went to a drawer and unlocked it when Ailie had gone to bed, after giving him a kiss, which he felt expressed disappointment. There were a few sovereigns in an old brown purse. He took them out and counted them. How well he knew their number.

"I was saving it," he murmured, "for the rainy day that is coming. But if Ailie wants it now,

perhaps I ought not to keep it back any longer. She had better have her pleasure now, poor child, and if I work very well I may get up a little store again. But"—and then the new dread came over him with a thrill of horror, and he put down the purse and wiped his brow nervously. But if what he feared were true? If he were losing his sight. Blindness and helplessness were probably before him. Who would work for Ailie? What would become of Marjory's child.

It was a thought, the agony of which had begun to embitter his days, and to render his nights sleepless. He felt sure that it was drawing nearer to him day by day. Yet he had not the courage to go to a doctor, for fear of hearing the worst. For what could a doctor say but bid him give up working? And that he could not do. Ailie must be supported. Even now he had grudged her some of her few pleasures, and with an aching heart had let little hints of hers pass by unheeded.

John walked up and down the room, and tried for the hundredth time to think out his perplexity. Oh for Marjory to tell him what to do! Ought he not to work on and save money for Ailie while his sight lasted? He felt that it could not be for long, if his weary aching eyes had no rest. He

thought of the winter evenings when the daylight was gone so soon, of the glaring gaslights that seemed to burn his eyes, and of his delicate work. Well, it must be borne, for what would be gained by giving up? Rest, in one way, but anxiety and the pain of seeing Ailie suffering want. "And most likely I should be blind any way in the end," he thought, striving to turn away from the horror of great darkness that came over him. "How Marjory would have grieved for me! It is good that she has been spared this," and John felt scalding tears come into his eyes, and he forced them back. Each day of eyesight was inestimable now.

Ailie must not know either. This great dread and sorrow must be borne, as all others had been borne for more than twenty years, alone, and in silence.

The next morning when he gave Ailie her breakfast he talked cheerfully, and peered into her face to see if she looked well. But he did not mention the sea. The avoidance gave far more pain to him than it did to Ailie, who happened not to be thinking about it. But John went off to his work with a dim feeling of having been unfaithful to Marjory in refusing her child's wish.

There was quite an outbreak of gaiety in the

rooms upstairs. Their appearance had not been so studied since the palmy days when John Hatherton brought home his bride. Mademoiselle Duval expected a visitor. Fresh curtains were put in the windows, and the furniture was rubbed into the highest state of polish. She herself fairly skipped up and down stairs in her joyous excitement, and bestowed fragments of her early history on Mrs Fuller and the charwoman.

Mrs Fuller heard with wonder of a chalet on the mountain-side, of glaciers, and of chamois. A young Englishman, years and years ago, came to hunt chamois, and fell in love with Clémence, Mademoiselle Duval's sister, the beauty of the canton.

"He no longer cared for the chase of the chamois."

"Then it is a beast, poor thing?" interrupted Mrs Fuller.

"Without doubt; have I not told you? But no matter."

Clémence married the hunter of chamois, and went to live in England, whither Léonie followed her when her own home was broken up. After a time the sister died, and the young Englishman, become a middle-aged Eng-

lishman by this time, married again, and did not care much, it seemed, for his little Swiss sister-in-law. Mademoiselle Duval passed lightly over this, and went on to speak of her niece, Mildred Abbot. Since the old days of Rachel, "the beautiful and well-favoured," there had been no maiden half so fair as this only child of her dead sister.

"She is coming on a long visit," her aunt daily assured the landlady. "Till now her father has found himself incapable of sparing the sunshine of his house, and no wonder. But Mildred has not forgotten me, and it is she who has persuaded her father to let her come—she wished it." And Mademoiselle Duval trotted off to her first lesson with an unconscious smile on her face, and a tear-stain left undried on the worn cover of "Noël et Chapsal."

Everybody in the house became more or less excited about Mildred Abbot. Mrs Fuller dreamt that something was going to happen, and Mademoiselle Duval came in, gracious and radiant, to promise Ailie a visit from her niece.

John looked pleased.

"It is very kind," he said, when they were alone. "It will be company for you, Ailie, and cheer you up."

"I daresay she won't care to come," answered

Ailie. "It will be dull for her here after her home by the sea-side. I wonder she cares to come to London."

John said no more.

Nevertheless, both Ailie and Mrs Fuller peeped from behind the blind in the ground-floor parlour when the cab arrived from the station, and the visitor had come.

"I believe she will bring sunshine to this house," said Mrs Fuller, solemnly, as she turned away and filled the teapot with hot water. "I saw it in her face; and how she must want her tea!"

John thought she brought sunshine too. For the next morning he heard her singing in the room above—singing with a young sweet voice that was wonderfully like Marjory's. How many years back that voice and tune carried him! It was an old song, a foolish old song that Marjory used to sing at Farncombe. And now the gay young voice sent every word clearly down to the unknown listener, to whom love and memory had made the little song sacred. Henceforward the new lodger's niece was some one set apart from the rest of the world to John. He loved her even before her kindness to Ailie gave her a claim on his deepest homage. Had she not Marjory's voice?

One evening about this time, when business was over, and John, thankful that the long painful hours of work were ended, was putting on his shabby greatcoat to go home, he was told that the foreman had sent for him.

John obeyed the summons quickly, wondering, and half alarmed. He was not mercenary, yet a rapid thought had time to cross his mind, that they might possibly be going to raise his wages. Times were hard, and he was a very old servant.

The foreman stood under the gas-light reading a letter. He looked up carelessly as John opened the door and stood waiting. "Ah, Hatherton, good evening. I have sent for you about that work of yours. You have taken to bungling lately in the strangest way. Never was such slovenly work."

John felt for the handle of the door, and grasped it tightly, or he thought he should have fallen, but he only said he was very sorry, in a voice that trembled a little, and was lower than usual.

"Yes," continued the foreman, a young man, who had entered the house years after John. "Yes, I hope you are sorry. This sort of thing won't do. You are one of our oldest workmen, and Mr Long  
great regard for you, but we can't have the

business injured by bad work. You must look sharp."

"Yes, sir, I will, indeed. I'll do my very best," said John, humbly.

"All right. I'm sure, I hope you will. You know as well as I do that the work can't be done properly without great care. Now, two or three watches that you have been repairing have been sent back to us again. They won't go. How do you account for that?"

John said that he did not know how to account for it, indeed. It must have been an accident, a very sad accident.

"Well, if these accidents go on happening to you we must part, that's all. We can keep none but first-rate hands here."

"I have a good deal of experience—I have been considered a good workman," put in John's trembling voice.

"Ah, I daresay. I believe you have. But I'm afraid that is all in the past. It strikes me that your eyesight is going, that's the truth. You can't see!"

"I can, sir! I can, indeed," said John, eagerly. "Pray, believe me. Perhaps my eyesight is not quite so sharp as it used to be, sir, but I can see "



"Well, well, Hatherton, you know best. Mr Long is willing to give you another chance. But it's the last, mind. I give you fair warning."

"Yes, sir ; thank you, sir."

"And I shall have my eye upon you. You had better take those watches to put right at home. Good evening, Hatherton."

It had been but a short interview, yet the other workmen were all gone ; and the shop was empty when John put on his poor old greatcoat for the second time, and went out into the chilly night. He felt stunned at first, and as he walked along wondered why he was not more unhappy. "I suppose I ought not to mind, as they have given me another trial," he thought, "but it seemed to come upon me hard and sudden. I mustn't tell any one, oh no ; and I will walk about until I have got over it. 'Never was such slovenly work,' the young man said. I thought I did my best"—and then John paused suddenly—"No, no, I mustn't say that, or think it. I must do better or I shall be turned off. My poor old eyes are not quite gone yet ;" but when John put his hand up to them they were covered with tears—hot burning tears that would not be suppressed.

It was a dark night. There was no fear of any

one noticing him, as he passed on with his bent head and feeble step, but John was very much ashamed of his tears. "It was only because it was sudden and new to me," he went on to himself. "I never was found fault with before in all these years; quite the contrary." For John remembered a time when any watch in a particularly critical state was given into his hands as a matter of course—Marjory used to be proud of his skill.

' "I wasn't thinking of anything being said to me like that. It's very weak to cry, but I suppose I am weak altogether, and useless. But I must do my best still. Just for a little longer."

He turned into an optician's shop, and bought the strongest spectacles that could be had for money. He thought he would wear them at work, besides the magnifying glass, which, alas, had already done his eyes so much harm. It might help him. At all events it was worth the attempt.

"These glasses are very trying to the sight, sir, I suppose you know," said the man civilly and doubtfully as he looked at John. "They wear the eyes out very fast if they are too much used."

John smiled sadly, and thanked him. But he took his parcel, nevertheless, and went home to sit for a little while with Ailie, and when she went to

bed, he put on the new spectacles, and worked at the watch he had brought home until late at night. He made a rapid stride towards blindness that day. Now that others had found out the secret of his failing sight, it seemed as if the struggle to keep it could not last much longer.

A little while afterwards he was bending over his work one evening, and following the old train of anxious and perplexing thought. The new spectacles had been of no help to him, and were laid aside as useless. His eyes ached very much to-night, and he often had to pause and hold his hand over them to ease their smarting. It was coming, even faster than he expected. Who would help them? Where could he turn when he could no longer work for Marjory's child?

He had been conscious of voices talking in the adjoining room. Now the voice that was like Marjory's read aloud, the sweet young voice that he had heard sing. And these were the words that broke in upon his heavy thoughts :—"Let not your hearts be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

"Ah," thought John, "it is easy for the young and happy to have untroubled hearts, but when life seems all trouble, when one cannot work for

those who have been left to your care, when old age is coming upon you, and blindness, and when your comforter, your only comforter, was taken away years ago"—

But the voice came in once more, very soft and tender. He had lost the thread of the reading hitherto. "He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever."

John's glasses grew so dim as he heard, that he was obliged to take them off, and not to try to work. "Another Comforter!" Was it possible that he might find one—he who had been alone for so long; he who needed comfort so sorely?

"I will not leave you comfortless," the message-like words went on, "I will come unto you."

John pushed away his work and bent forward to listen.

The tears poured over his face unheeded, as the wonderful words went on, with their burden of comfort, love, peace.

He heard that solemn legacy of peace pronounced—"Not as the world giveth, give I unto you;" and then, like music falling back into its old key, came again, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

The voice ceased. He felt at the moment neither

troubled nor afraid. Quietly and softly in that hour the Comforter came to John Hatherton.

Mrs Fuller was right. Mildred Abbot was very like a gleam of sunshine in that dingy little lodging-house. They needed brightening there sadly, by Mademoiselle Duval's account, given to her niece in a succession of concise sketches of the household, as they sat at tea the first evening.

There was the poor good man, she said, with the broken heart, who lived on the ground-floor. He had one daughter who was always ill. It was a sad story which Mrs Fuller would tell her. Mrs Fuller was the landlady, and a widow, poor thing. Even the maid of all works had known trouble, and the char-woman's family misfortunes had been of the most heart-rending description.

"And then here am I, living on the first floor by myself, a lonely old maid. I am afraid we are a very sad set for you to come amongst, Mildred," and Mademoiselle Duval pushed away the muffins despondingly, struck with a sudden sense of the dark colours in her painting.

But Mildred did not think so. She was ready for everybody. Under her influence Aunt Léonie described her evenings as being passed in paradise. Strange sounds, bursts of hearty laughter, and

scraps of old Swiss songs were heard from the first-floor parlour. Its little mistress went to bed at night so light of heart that she often dreamt she was in Switzerland, and opened her eyes with wonder on the London fog.

Even Ailie was won by the grave sympathy of the kind brown eyes, and Mrs Fuller had softened into love and expanded into confidence about the second day.

John interested Mildred the most. She heard his story over and over again, both from his daughter and the landlady.

"If mother had not died it would have all been different," ended Ailie, listlessly.

"But your father lives only for you."

"Oh, yes, I know. But we have always been very poor, and mother would have kept things straight."

There was a flash of indignation in the brown eyes, but Mildred held her peace.

"I thought Mr Hatherton had a son," she said to Mrs Fuller. "Where is he?"

"In Australia, Miss Mildred. Didn't I tell you how that selfish uncle of his, whom I never could abide, took him off when he was a little boy. We haven't heard from him for a good bit now."

"I wonder he does not come home to help his father," said Mildred, thoughtfully. "Do you think he can have forgotten him?"

"I don't know what to think, my dear. They have a sheep farm out there, I believe—a run he called it, and what with running after his sheep, and rampaging about the bush with his selfish uncle, there's no saying what he may have forgotten. Only this I will say, bold little Ralph must be changed indeed if he could hear of his father in trouble and not try to help him."

"Perhaps he doesn't know," suggested Mildred.

"Then he ought to know. I've no patience with him leaving his old father so long. I sometimes think that the poor boy is dead, eaten by kangaroos, or something," and Mrs Fuller sighed. "However, I've done what I could, and we shall see by and by."

Which mysterious sentence she could in no wise be induced to explain. "Only you go on being kind to Mr Hatherton, Miss Mildred, dear, and God bless you. Read him some more chapters out of the Bible. They cheer him up, I can see, and do him good."

Mildred often read to Ailie and her father now. It was John's great pleasure, for often before he

had handled Marjory's old Bible wistfully, unable to see to read it for himself. It tired Ailie to read aloud, and only sometimes Mrs Fuller was able to come in, and, after an elaborate ceremonial of putting on spectacles and arranging lights before and behind, to "read him off a chapter or two."

A couple of months passed before John was summoned once more by his employers. It was not the foreman this time, but the head of the firm. He spoke kindly, though what he said was hard enough.

"I am sorry to hear that your health is not good," he began good naturedly. "You look very sadly."

"I thank you, sir," said John, with one of his sad smiles. "My health is pretty good, but I am growing an old man."

"Ah, we must all grow old. The thing is to know when to give in, and to acknowledge that our best days are over."

If John had not been sure before, he knew now why he was wanted.

"Mr Dixon spoke to you about your work some time ago, and you wished to try and hold on a little longer he told me. He agreed to make



no change then ; but I am afraid, Hatherton, it won't do."

He paused, and John, feeling he was expected to say something, murmured, "No, sir."

"I know you have done your best," continued the master, with a touch of emotion in his voice.

"I have indeed, sir."

"And I am sorry to have to say this, but for your own sake as well as ours it is better that you should give up. I can see that you are suffering from your eyes."

There was a pause. John had received his dismissal, and ought to have gone away, but he stood still, and seemed trying to swallow down something which prevented his speaking.

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness in all these years," he said at last ; "and I shall esteem it as a great favour if you will please to listen to a few words. I won't detain you long, sir, but I am a very poor man, and I have got an only daughter who is sick." John's words came slowly here. "If you should have a porter's place to give, or to go errands, something where I could just earn a few shillings a week, I should be grateful. I am strong enough all but my eyes, and I would work hard ; and I am very willing."

"Certainly, yes, we can do that for you. You shall have a light porter's place. I only wish I had something better to give you, my poor fellow. I will speak about it."

John repeated his meek thanks and went away, casting a last look upon the high stool that had been his for so long, and which would know him no more.

He told Ailie tenderly of his fallen fortunes that night. To himself the blow had been long expected, and he could bear it better this time, for the words "Let not your heart be troubled," seemed to be whispered to him. As he walked home he repeated Marjory's favourite psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd," it began, "I shall not want." And John believed it, and was comforted.

But it was sad to hear him almost begging his daughter to forgive him for the failing sight that had been worn out in her service.

Ailie was really roused and anxious. "Are your eyes so bad, father," she said, leaning forward to look more closely into his face.

"They are not good enough for watch-making," he answered, smiling, "but I daresay they will get better when they have so much rest."

"Then perhaps the change is good for you?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. But it comes hard on you, my poor Ailie. I am afraid we cannot pay our rent here any longer. I am afraid we must leave."

"Leave here!" exclaimed Ailie, "leave Mrs Fuller and this house where I was born! Dear father, you never can, because of mother."

"If we could stay, Ailie, I would," and John sighed heavily.

But as far as this trouble was concerned Mrs Fuller speedily put it to rest. Wild horses should not induce her to accept the notice to quit. She held John's hand in both of hers, as with tears running down her cheeks, and an utter disregard of grammar, she bade him never mind about the rent, and not talk nonsense.

"Me let you go, indeed; because a jack-in-office doesn't know a good workman when he has him."

"I am afraid I am very blind," interposed John.

"Well, what if you are? is that a reason for going away from me? You! as I've brought up as it were! and Ailie, a baby in arms, born in the house. Rent don't come between you and me, Mr Hatherton!"

And Mrs Fuller went up-stairs and told her story to Mildred in language that was really pathetic.

"O Mrs Fuller, poor fellow! I am so glad you made him stay."

"Stay? Why, my dear, where would you have had him go? Coming to give me notice of leaving, with that poor patient puzzled face of his, and talking of this day week! I should like to have been there when he settled with his new landlady, that's all."

Mrs Fuller laughed and cried at once.

John became a porter, and returned to Ailie in the evenings very weary with the unaccustomed toil. But if he could have petted and waited upon her more than he did before—if he could have spent himself more completely in her service, he would have done so now, when he thought of the privations she had to bear. He did his very best, but the money would not hold out. For the first time in his life John got into debt. There were shops which he began to dread passing, and tradesmen from whom he had humbly to beg for a little patience. Some were kind and willing to wait. Others grumbled; and one, a hard-hearted grocer, grew to be the terror of John's life.

He used to come home in fear and trembling lest this creditor should be there before him.

Mrs Fuller opened the door to him one evening,

and greeted him with an unusually red face, and a disposition to embrace him that utterly bewildered John.

"Ah, there you are at last, Mr Hatherton. Come in, you are wanted. Some one is waiting to see you. Why, how late you are!"

"Waiting to see me!" said John, with a beating heart. "Who?"

"There, go in and see. In there with Ailie. Go in!"

Mrs Fuller opened the door and almost pushed him in. John saw that some one was sitting in his own place by the fire, and leaning over the arm of Ailie's chair. A tall man who turned quickly, and started up to meet him.

"I hear you are pleased to see me, sir," he began humbly; but the tall man had put his arm over John's shoulder, and was calling him "father." Mrs Fuller was in the doorway drying her eyes on her apron, and Ailie stood up, saying in a voice between laughing and crying, "Don't you see, father. It is Ralph!"

"Ralph!" John put up his hand to push his son away, and looked up eagerly, but almost uselessly, in his face.

No one spoke for a moment. The troubles of so

many years had told heavily upon John. Over-taxed and weary, they had noticed several times lately that his memory was failing. Anything sudden perplexed and confused him.

"Ralph, our son!" he said vaguely, at last. "Oh, no, they took him away years ago, when Marjory died."

He sat down in his arm-chair, and his head sunk forward on his breast.

Brother and sister exchanged startled glances.

"He does not know me," said Ralph, sorrowfully.

"He is tired," whispered Ailie. "Father!"

John looked up slowly—"Ralph—did any one say Ralph was here?"

Ralph knelt down beside him.

"Here, father!"

The weak hand, Ralph could feel its trembling, was passed over his head, and then rested on his shoulder.

"My boy!" John said.

Ralph stooped forward, so that his head leant for a moment on his father's breast.

"Ralph, welcome home."

And father and son had found each other again.

Mrs Fuller could find no rest for the sole of h

foot that evening. She spent it principally in the passage, lying in wait for any chance comer, that she might burst upon them with her joyful news. When Mildred and her aunt came in rather late, Mrs Fuller met them hurriedly, exclaiming—

“The cat is out of the bag, Miss Mildred. He is come.”

“The cat! what cat?” asked unconscious Aunt Léonie.

“Ralph is come—our Ralph—a cat indeed! He is six feet two in height, Miss Mildred, and a brown beard. Look in, only look in as you pass, my dear, and see him with his father.”

Mildred peeped in for a moment through the half-open door. The dismal little room was full of light and warmth. Four times had reckless Mrs Fuller put on coals since Ralph's arrival, and every one else had worked off their excitement by stirring the fire into a blaze. John's chair was drawn into the circle of light, and he was looking up with a smile, striving to see as much as he could of his son's features. Even at this moment his faithful hand has sought for, and clasped Ailie's, as if in mute assurance that his joy was for her sake.

Mildred wished that John could see Ralph clearly, as he stood now, leaning over the back of

a chair, with the firelight on his face. But perhaps it did not matter. Voice and step and touch told almost as much as sight could have done to the blind man. "Bold little Ralph" had come back a man, and John knew now as surely as in after days, the strong, gentle, fearless nature that he leant on instinctively already.

It was only for a moment that Mildred looked, for Ralph was speaking. So she disengaged herself from Mrs Fuller and ran up-stairs, leaving the excited landlady still rooted to the spot.

"And you only landed to-day, Ralph?" said Ailie.

"Only to-day, of course. Father," he went on rapidly, "I would have come back to you long ago if I could. I hope you believe that. But I never knew what was going on at home until"——

"Until I wrote to him," interrupted Mrs Fuller, darting forwards. "I said I would, and I did."

"Yes; until this dear good woman wrote to me and told me of your troubles. You never told me of them, father."

"Ah, no, indeed, not he."

"I have been coming home ever since. I only stayed to settle things out there. My uncle died last year. We had a hard time of it enough"



we first went out, but he had been doing well for some years when his health failed—of course I stayed with him then.”

“More than he deserved, Ailie,” put in Mrs Fuller softly. “Harry Forrester was selfish”——

“Hush,” said Ailie; “listen!”

“I am listening, my dear, most attentive. I should never have known his voice, Ailie.”

“Uncle Harry was always very good to me in his way,” continued Ralph; “and at the last he spoke of you kindly, father, and sent a message. I should have come home directly then; but there was a great deal to be settled, for he left me all he had.”

“There, I said so,” observed Mrs Fuller. “He has made a fortune.”

“Not a large one, Mrs Fuller,” said Ralph, smiling. “Fortunes are not made so quick now-a-days—but enough to make my father comfortable, thanks to Uncle Harry. We can do anything you like, father. We can take a small farm somewhere. I don't know anything about English farming, but I can learn, I suppose, and you will help me.”

“Mr Hatherton a farmer! poor dear, bless his heart,” ejaculated Mrs Fuller; and Ailie laughed

—a clear amused laugh, that brought a smile over John's face directly.

"No, Ralph, I can't farm, my boy, I should only be a hindrance."

Ralph did not laugh. He put his hand upon his father's shoulder. That feeble, stooping, broken old man inspired a feeling that was less of a son's affection, than a longing to protect and guard one whom the world had used so roughly.

Reality had thrown a very sobering shade over the pictures Ralph had painted of his home-coming.

His father was old and nearly blind, and Ailie seemed ill and spiritless. But to Ralph's buoyant nature this only proved that he had come back just at the right time.

He was a true Australian, prompt in action, and full of a tireless energy that startled his friends at home. He had given indignant warning that his father's services as porter were over, long before John had found time to do more than think that perhaps he need not go on with his work much longer. He had been to the other end of England and over to Ireland to see old Australian friends, and to carry tidings of the far-away. But he was back again in London before Mrs Fuller was

to turn round and be sure that he was really gone.

And he made new friends, too. Mildred Abbot had been very kind to his father, and Ralph was wonderfully grateful. So much so, that he often preferred travelling day and night to missing one of the many visits she paid Ailie. Moreover, he was seeking for a farm in some quiet country village, where John was to rest after the hard labour of his life.

"I did not think he would have grown so old," Ralph said, rather sadly, to Mildred. He had been home about a month now, and was standing with Mildred in the window of Marjory's old sitting-room.

John Hatherton had come up-stairs with his son. He scarcely noticed Mildred when he entered, but went silently to his former place by the fire-side, and was now turning a peculiar, wistful, straining gaze from one familiar object to another.

"I shall not forget," they heard him saying to himself; "I am sure I shall not forget."

"He asked to come here to-day," resumed Ralph, "that he might see my mother's room once more before he grows quite blind. You have heard about my mother?"

"Yes," answered Mildred, "often."

"You are sitting where she always used to sit," said Ralph, softly. "My father says her voice was just like yours."

Mildred was looking at John Hatherton, and did not speak immediately.

"I am so glad he has some one to take care of him at last," she said presently. "I think the story of his life wonderfully touching. What a pleasure for you to make his old age happy! He looks so weary."

"And his hair is quite gray—poor old father."

John turned at the sound of his own name. "Yes, Ralph, I am coming. My dear," he continued, taking Mildred's hands in both his own, "you will forgive us for disturbing you. You know that this was home to me when I was young, and when my children were little, and life was different. I wanted my boy to see his mother's room."

"Oh, yes," said Mildred, "you will often come again?"

"Thank you, my dear," and John smiled. "I don't think I shall forget it now. I often wish I could see you better, for you are very good to us, and a great comfort to Ailie and to me. Thank you."

"There is only one place where he would be really happy," said Ralph, lingering after his father had gone away. "I want to take him there."

"Not Farncombe?"

"Yes, Farncombe. I have heard of a farm there. Don't speak of it to any one yet, please. I shall go and see it directly."

"How nice! how perfect!" exclaimed Mildred.

"Why, it would be perfect if I could have all my own way about it," and Ralph looked straight into Mildred's face; "but"——

He broke off as the door opened, for he had another secret to keep besides the one about the farm at Farncombe. Not that it was much of a secret, for every one in the house except John had guessed it long ago.

There were gatherings every evening by John Hatherton's fireside. To Ralph's Australian ideas it was utterly incomprehensible that they should live under the same roof, and yet spend all their evenings apart. "Just as if we had quarrelled, Mrs Fuller, or did not like each other."

So evening after evening passed rapidly away, while Ralph told the story of his colonial adventures to a most sympathetic audience. He told them about wild rides across the bush, and

nights spent by a camp fire, or in some lonely hut. Of a fight with the bushrangers, which made Mademoiselle Duval's blood run cold even more than the old brigand stories, once the terror of her childhood; of the bush on fire, when, as they rode at full speed, the wind and flames followed roaring behind them; and of an evening in an Australian forest on which their hunting-party came upon the skeleton of a man lying all alone in the vast solitude, with a rifle still grasped within its bony hand.

Sometimes Mildred forgot her work as she listened, and leant forward with her chin resting on her hand, and her eyes fixed on Ralph. And then the story was continued with more earnestness than ever. Ralph would throw in a touch of pathos about the exile's dreams of home, and the great longing after friends and country that used to come over him sometimes in the deep silence of the night, when the stars were shining overhead.

Aunt Léonie grew frightened as the time passed on.

"If I could only see my duty," she sighed to Mrs. Fuller. "If I were only sure I ought not to let Mildred's father know."

"No, no, Mam'selle," said Mrs. Fuller, with a beaming face. "It's just the best thing th

could happen to Mr Hatherton and all. Don't disturb them."

"But my position—only figure it to yourself. I never cease to beg that Mildred may come to me. Her father fears to part with her. I promise ten thousand times to watch over her. He confides her to me at last—and I marry her."

"Why, my dear Mam'selle, I never meant that they need marry without the old gentleman's consent."

"No, no ; I speak figuratively. But I imagine that 'Monsieur Raff' speaks to me. I have to lay before my brother-in-law a proposal of marriage for Mildred: You do not know him." Mademoiselle Duval shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"Well, and I should like to know what any father or brother-in-law either could find to say against our Ralph," retorted Mrs Fuller, hotly. "He'd be too pleased, I am sure. No, Mam'selle," she added, her tone softening, "let the poor dears be. Mr Hatherton has got a little peace at last, and if Ralph was to lose Mildred there's no saying how it would all end. You would never forgive yourself if he went tearing back to Australia and got himself lost in the bush, like that poor skeleton

he found under a tree. Think what would be your feelings then, let alone his poor father's."

"Ah, true."

"And sometimes I think," continued Mrs Fuller, sighing, "that there is another trouble coming on Mr Hatherton even now. Look at Ailie."

It was true. One more dark cloud was gathering round the sunset of John's life. Ailie was ill, really ill, and her father terribly unhappy. They talked of her going with Mildred by and by to her home by the sea-side. Mildred spoke hopefully of the fresh sea-air. Meanwhile, John sat all day long by Ailie's bedside.

Coming home one evening from one of his rapid journeys, Ralph quietly opened the door of his sister's little room. Mildred was there with John and Ailie. She had been reading aloud, but the light was beginning to fail. Ailie had fallen half asleep, and neither her father nor Mildred had spoken for a long time.

"There is Ralph," said John, looking up, as his son's footsteps crossed the room beyond.

Ralph turned to Mildred after the first greetings. "You were reading to my father," he said, glancing at the book which still lay open on her knee.

"She has been doing everything for us," an



John took Mildred's hand and kissed it with old-fashioned courtesy. "She has been waiting on Ailie, and reading to us, and she is going to give Ailie her tea now. I wish we could show her, Ralph, how grateful we are."

"Hush," said Mildred, laughing. "I must go and look after my kettle before it boils over."

Ralph followed her presently into the other room. The kettle was singing merrily on the fire, and Mildred stood at the window watching the pink sunset clouds that floated high above the smoke.

"Mildred," said Ralph, in a low voice. "It is done."

"The farm? have you taken it?"

"Yes. I have just come from Farncombe. It is wonderfully unchanged. I am sure—I hope—you would think it pretty. Our farm is on the edge of the common, within sight of the inn, my mother's old home, and near the churchyard where she lies."

"I am very glad," said Mildred, with her face turned half away. "Your father will be so happy."

"And now, Mildred, will you help me? Only you can. You see how he loves you; and, O Mildred, to me you are all—all that my mother was to him!"

When John came in by and by, and they told him, a beautiful bright smile came over his face. He took Mildred in his arms, and said, "I am glad, very glad, for Ralph; and for myself, Mildred, I cannot tell how or why I feel as if I had got a bit of Marjory back."

Only one or two more scenes, for there remains but little more to tell.

One is at Mildred's home, and she is sitting alone beside Ailie's couch. Mademoiselle Duval's fears have long been set at rest. Ralph had managed by means best known to himself, to take the formidable brother-in-law by storm, and he brought back a letter that though it scolded and grumbled all through, yet gave full consent, and set Aunt Léonie's heart free to dance as gaily as it would. Mr Abbot had actually invited her, as well as Ailie, to go home with Mildred; and Aunt Léonie was a proud woman.

"Mildred," Ailie said, softly—it was twilight in the room, and the moon rose slowly over the sea—"I shall never see Farncombe!"

"Dear sister, do not say so."

"Farncombe has been a sort of dream to me all my life; too bright a place to be true—something unreal." Ailie's smile was only a little sad

fretful as of old. "You see, Milly, I have grumbled so much all my life, and been so unfaithful, that it is right I should die in the wilderness within sight of the Promised Land."

"There is a better land," Mildred said, not quite steadily.

"Yes, oh yes!" and Ailie clasped her hands, and a faint glow came over her pale face.

John knew nothing of all this. He was in London, watched over by Mrs Fuller, and he fancied that Ailie was getting better. Ralph was at Farncombe working himself into a fever over his preparations.

There came a letter from Mildred to Mrs Fuller. Ailie had got a cold. She was worse. The letter was very carefully worded, but it begged John to go down to them at once. Somebody would be waiting to meet him by the first train. "Ailie is always asking for him," wrote Mildred. That Ailie should have asked once was more than enough for John. He was off within the hour, sedulously concealing from himself that he was anxious, and speaking cheerfully to Mrs Fuller at the last minute of bringing Ailie home soon quite a different creature.

He reached the little house close to the sea, and

as he waited at the door he drew in long breaths of the fresh sea-wind, and listened to the waves tumbling on to the beach below with a smile of pleasure at the idea of Ailie's enjoyment in them. For himself, the glare on the sea hurt his eyes already, but it did not occur to John to think of that.

Mildred opened the door to him.

"Hush!" she said, drawing him into the narrow passage. "Ailie is asleep."

In the solemn presence that was drawing near ordinary greetings were suspended. John never noticed that.

"Asleep!" he responded, cheerfully. "That is right, dear child! I will wait until she wakes—who would not sleep in such an air as this?"

Mildred looked shocked.

"Ailie is very ill," she said, in a low voice.

"She is often ill—very often," said John, shaking his head. "So this is a bad day with her. Poor Ailie!"

Why was it that he who had been meeting sorrow half-way all his life turned from it so resolutely now?

The door opened again. Ralph had been summoned too. Mildred went out to meet him.

"Well, Ralph," began his father as he entered ;

"I did not know that you were coming here. Your sister has a bad cold—only a bad cold—but dear Mildred is anxious, and it is sad for her just now, when the sea was making her so strong."

John could not see, as Ralph did, Mildred's grave face and beckoning hand. He followed her from the room. John wondered at their absence, and then grew a little indignant lest Ralph should have been allowed the first visit to Ailie. He thought he would go and find them; but the house was strange, and the helplessness of blindness was upon him, so he drew a chair near the door and sat down patiently to wait.

Ralph came back alone.

"Father," he said, and he put his hand on the old man's shoulder and hesitated.

"Well, Ralph, you haven't been waking up Ailie, I trust. Colds are nothing to strong people, but they may be serious to her, you know."

"Ailie is very ill," said Ralph, watching his father's face.

He understood now. The son had not so hard a task as he anticipated. John's mind was unused to hopefulness. It turned back readily to sorrow. And in the interval of waiting in the darkness

some glimmer of the truth had reached him. He bowed down his head now and was silent.

"She is longing to see you," said Ralph, very tenderly. "She is awake, and knows that you have come. When you are ready"——

"I am ready." John got up unsteadily, and held by his son's arm.

They went up-stairs together. Ah! John could not see the changed face, the fever-spot on either cheek, the large bright eyes, but he heard the stifled cry, "O father!" and he was holding Ailie in his arms.

"Father!" the words were sometimes whispered, sometimes spoken clearly, as the labouring breath allowed.

"Dear father, oh, forgive me, I have been a trouble and a sorrow to you all my life."

"No, no, my Ailie! My dear Ailie, my sunbeam—always my sunbeam."

"Hush!—never that. I might have been a comfort though I was ill"——

"My comfort! my blessing!"

"Don't cry so, father. I have longed to ask you to forgive me before I die. Mildred has made me see things so very differently. If I could have lived I would have tried to make you happy. I have saddened all your life."

"Never! never!"

"It is true. I let you work for me, but I never welcomed you even with a smile when you used to come in so tired. Father, look at me, I want you to remember one smile on Ailie's face."

"Yes, yes," sobbed John, "your mother's smile—Marjory's smile."

"Father," she said, watching him intently, "you have not looked into my face."

He was silent.

"Can't you see at all?"

"No, Ailie," he answered, quietly.

She sank back with a low cry.

"But I don't mind," continued John, eagerly. "Don't think I do. I am never to work any more, but to live with Ralph at Farncombe. Ailie, what's this?" For Ailie's sobs were choking her.

"I always thought he would get better," she gasped. "I have let him work for me until he is quite blind—quite blind."

Ralph came forward and drew his father away.

"She ought to be quiet now," he said, putting his arm caressingly over the old man's trembling shoulders. "We must leave her to Mildred for a little while."

"Let me thank him, Ralph, before he goes;" and Ailie clung to his hand and kissed it. "For all your love, father—for your wonderful patience—for your long days and weary nights of work, oh, if I could thank you!"

Her voice was failing. Her head sank back upon Mildred's arm.

"You must rest now, father," said Ralph, as they went down-stairs.

John made no resistance. He let his son do as he would with him, and he lay down where Ralph put him, a weary, blind, bewildered old man. He fell fast asleep.

It was evening when he awoke, and Mildred and Ralph were in the room.

"Let me go to Ailie," said John, rising; but Ralph held him gently back, and Mildred said tremulously—

"She sent her love. She would not let us wake you, but she made us promise to thank you again, and to tell you she was happy."

"I do not understand." John turned his blind eyes from one to the other.

"Marjory's child is with her mother," whispered Mildred, for at the moment Ralph had neither voice nor words.



John Hatherton's life-charge was over—his work was done. The child he had so cherished had passed away into safer Guardianship than his. Henceforward he had only to wait in an evening twilight of tenderness and rest.

A little while, and Ralph and Mildred took him home to Farncombe.

The sun was setting behind the old church, and the shadow of the cross upon its roof had fallen over Marjory's grave, when her husband stood beside it once again after so many years.

Ralph guided his hand to rest upon the headstone.

"It looks very peaceful—very like herself."

"My Marjory," whispered John, "I am near you again at last."

But as he spoke he did not look down at the grave, but up to heaven.

So sunshine settled on Ralph and Mildred's home. Old friends often gathered there. Aunt Léonie trotted gaily across the common, and held up her hands in admiration of Mildred's dairy. Mrs Fuller never grew tired of counting the ducks in the farm-yard pond, and spent long summer days gathering roses in the old-fashioned garden,

or picking fruit to initiate Mildred in the real mysteries of preserve-making.

And Mildred was a true daughter to John. Nearly every evening the old blind man was to be seen in the porch of the farm-house, his two hands clasped over Mildred's arm, listening while she described, in the simple language in which you would tell a story to a child, the scene which lay before them.

"You would be pleased to see the common now, father," she would say; "there is such a bright light upon it. It is really quite dazzling. The baker's cart is coming along the new track I told you they were making, and his white horse looks whiter than ever in the sunshine. You have no idea how the cart jolts up and down in the sandy ruts. Ah, there goes Ralph full gallop across the common on Bushranger! I am afraid he still rides more like an Australian settler than a sober English farmer. The poor old donkey with the clog on its foot is shambling out of Bushranger's way, and Ralph has set a whole flock of geese cackling and running across the common with their wings stretched out. There is a stranger standing at the cross-roads trying to read the old sign-post that has

been worn out for the last twenty years. He is sitting down to rest on a big stone."

"I know it," said John, "close to the great thorn to the right of the road."

"Yes, just there. Ah, father, I needn't tell you that the children have come out of school. Don't their voices sound merry? They are all over the common already. There go a dozen boys to the pond, and a little girl is coming towards us, running, oh, so fast."

"So fast," echoed John. "Just as Marjory used to run. I can see her coming, Milly, almost as well as you can, but it is five and thirty years ago—five and thirty years. Whereabouts is the little girl now?"

"She has just passed the three fir-trees, she is coming down the steep sandy bit."

"She will have to jump over a ditch, and there are some roots of the old fir-trees where Marjory once caught her little foot and fell. Is the child safe past there, Milly?"

"Yes. Dear father, how well you remember it all!"

"Remember! why, I see it all. I know by the fresh feeling in the air how far the sun has got down. You can see the gleam of the school-house

windows, can't you, Milly? The sun has just caught them, and the trunks of the fir-trees are red, are not they? And Marjory's little pond is losing the sunlight, and the road looks white and the grass green, just as it did when she used to be so pleased to get on to the common again out of all the dust—dear Marjory."

"Father, it is not dark to you."

"No, not dark. It grows lighter every day. The Bible says so to me. 'At evening time it shall be light.' It is evening, Milly, and why should I wish for sight since Ailie wants for nothing, and I could not see Marjory's face."

John was very happy now. Happy when he walked to church leaning on his son's strong arm, happy when Mildred sang hymns to him with the sweet voice that reminded him of Marjory's, or when the bell-ringers practised, as they often did, at sunset. John loved those chimes. They had rung a brave peal for Marjory on her wedding-day, and had tolled for her sadly and tenderly when she was carried to her grave. They spoke to him now, as the mournful undertone blended in with the glad melody both of parting and of meeting. So he was always happy when the evening breeze brought the music of the bells.

But he was happiest of all sitting in the sunshine with his blind Bible open before him, and his trembling fingers passing over the letters.

Mildred told her husband that something in the expression of his uplifted face nearly made her cry. She and Ralph used to stand by unseen, and hear him read slowly half aloud, "And now—we—see—through a glass—darkly, but then—face to face."

Yes, face to face with the great joy of heaven—face to face once more, John humbly dared to add, with Marjory, the lost love of his youth, and with another whom he never thought of among the angels but with a smile upon her lips—with "Marjory's child."

THE END.

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